

February 19th 2024: I've decided not to include the Reader's Corner. They're annoying and I don't feel like editing them en masse.

To do:

- 1.put illustrations in the right spots, describe all

- 2.?

Month = Header 1

Title = Header 2

Chapters = header 3

Astounding Stories Of Super- Science

Contributing Authors, in order of appearance:

Victor Rousseau Emanuel

Sterner St. Paul Meek

Ray Cummings

M. L. Staley

Charles Victor Tench

Murray Leinster

Anthony Pelcher

Harold Vincent Schoepflin

Charles Willard Diffin

Hugh Barnett Cave

Sophie Wenzel Ellis

Will Smith

R. J. Robbins

Sewell Peaslee Wright

A. T. Locke

Thomas Holt Knight

Arthur Josephus Burks

Tom Curry

Lilith Lorraine

James P. Olsen

Roman Frederick Starzl

Edmond Hamilton

Harold Thompson Rich

Miles John Breuer, M.D.

Paul Ernst

Robert Henry Leifred

Jackson Gee

William Merriam Rouse

Lloyd Arthur Eshbach

David R. Sparks

Hal K. Wells

Note from the editor of this master file:

This compilation was started on July 2nd, 2023, by Tinyel. Which is pronounced exactly the way it looks: tin-yell. Two syllables. I am nonbinary, and my pronouns are it/its/itself.

This means that rather than saying “He combined Astounding Stories of Super-Science into one master book”, or “She edited the formatting from the original magazine's set up”, or “They removed all the randomly inserted advertisements and put them in the back of the book”, you say: “It wanted to make life easier for future readers of Astounding Stories of Super-Science, so it created this compilation so you don't have to. That was very nice of it.”

Originally published from January 1930 to January 1931, the following short stories were spaced out across thirteen issues of Astounding Stories of Super-Science.

They are now (and have been for a while) public domain, meaning they belong to everyone and no one, and are available to download from Gutenberg.org, archive.org, and many other places, for free, endlessly.

To make things more convenient for future readers, I have compiled all the short stories into a single file, with the formatting fixed from the original magazine layout, the illustrations put in the proper places, trigger warnings added before each story, and the stories that had been originally broken up into multiple parts now combined into a whole. Stories that had sequels will now have the sequel immediately following the first story.

This version of the master file will include all stories as they were originally published. A second version will be hand-picked of my favorite of these stories, with are also the ones with the least amount of bigotry.

Each story will have specific warnings and ratings in front for your convenience, but as a general warning,

many of the authors showcased here were cis straight white privileged men, and they hated women, they hated Black and brown people, they hated fat people, they hated disabled people, they hated foreigners...the list goes on.

Some of these stories are more bigoted than others, and some are so bigoted I had to stop and resist the urge to throw my phone across the room. Some of them are also just not very well written.

I hope you enjoy reading at least some of these stories.

Astounding Stories of Super-Science

January 1931

#64 The Dark Side Of Antri, By Sewell Peaslee Wright:

Commander John Hanson relates an interplanetary adventure illustrating the splendid service spirit of the men of the special patrol.

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:



- - -

An officer of the Special Patrol Service dropped in to see me the other day. He was a young fellow, very sure of himself, and very kindly towards an old man.

He was doing a monograph, he said, for his own amusement, upon the early forms of our present offensive and defensive weapons. Could I tell him about the first Deuber spheres and the earlier disintegrator rays and the crude atomic bombs we

tried back when I first entered the Service?

I could, of course. And I did. But a man's memory does not improve in the course of a century of Earth years. Our scientists have not been able to keep a man's brain as fresh as his body, despite all their vaunted progress. There is a lot these deep thinkers, in their great laboratories, don't know. The whole universe gives them the credit for what's been done, yet the men of action who carried out the ideas—but I'm getting away from my pert young officer.

He listened to me with interest and toleration. Now and then he helped me out, when my memory failed me on some little detail. He seemed to have a very fair theoretical knowledge of the subject.

"It seems impossible," he commented, when we had gone over the ground he had outlined, "that the Service could have done its work with such crude and undeveloped weapons, does it not?" He smiled in a superior sort of way, as though to imply we had probably done the best we could, under the circumstances.

I suppose I should not have permitted his attitude to irritate me, but I am an old man, and my life has not been an easy one.

“Youngster,” I said—like many old people, I prefer spoken conversation—“back in those days the Service was handicapped in every way. We lacked weapons, we lacked instruments, we lacked popular support, and backing. But we had men, in those days, who did their work with the tools that were at hand. And we did it well.”

“Yes, sir!” the youngster said hastily—after all, a retired commander in the Special Patrol Service does rate a certain amount of respect, even from these perky youngsters—“I know that, sir. It was the efforts of men like yourself who gave us the proud traditions we have to-day.”

“Well, that’s hardly true,” I corrected him. “I’m not quite so old as that. We had a fine set of traditions when I entered the Service, son. But we did our share to carry them on, I’ll grant you that.”

“‘Nothing Less than Complete Success,’” quoted the lad almost reverently, giving the ancient motto of our service. “That is a fine tradition for a body of men to aspire to, sir.”

“True. True.” The ring in the boy’s voice brought memories flocking. It was a proud motto; as old as I am, the words bring a thrill even now, a thrill comparable only with that which comes from seeing old Earth swell up out of the darkness of space after days of outer emptiness. Old Earth, with her wispy white clouds and her broad seas— Oh, I know I’m provincial, but that is another thing that must be forgiven an old man.

“I imagine, sir,” said the young officer, “that you could tell many a strange story of the Service, and the sacrifices men have made to keep that motto the proud boast it is to-day.”

“Yes,” I told him. “I could do that. I have done so. That is my occupation, now that I have been retired from active service. I—”

“You are a historian?” he broke in eagerly.

I forgave him the interruption. I can still remember my own rather impetuous youth.

“Do I look like a historian?” I think I smiled as I asked him the question, and held out my hands to him. Big brown hands they are, hardened with work, stained and drawn from old acid burns, and the bite of blue electric fire. In my day we worked with crude tools indeed; tools that left their mark upon the workman.

“No. But—”

I waved the explanation aside.

“Historians deal with facts, with accomplishments, with dates and places and the names of great men. I write—what little I do write—of men and high adventures, so that in this time of softness and easy living some few who may read my scribblings may live with me those days when the worlds of the universe were strange to each other, and there were many new things to be found and marveled at.”

“And I’ll venture, sir, that you find much enjoyment in the work,” commented the youngster with a degree of perception with which I had not credited him.

“True. As I write, forgotten faces peer at me through the mists of the years, and strong, friendly voices call to me from out of the past....”

“It must be wonderful to live the old adventures through again,” said the young officer hastily. Youth is always afraid of sentiment in old people. Why this should be, I do not know. But it is so.

The lad—I wish I had made a note of his name; I predict a future for him in the Service—left me alone, then, with the thoughts he had stirred up in my mind.

Old faces ... old voices. Old scenes, too.

Strange worlds, strange peoples. A hundred, a thousand different tongues. Men that came only to my knee, and men that towered ten feet above my head. Creatures—possessed of all the attributes of men except physical form—that belonged only in the

nightmare realms of sleep.

An old man's most treasured possessions: his memories. A face drew close out of the flocking recollections; the face of a man I had known and loved more than a brother so many years—dear God, how many years—ago.

Anderson Croy. Search all the voluminous records of the bearded historians, and you will not find his name. No great figure of history was this friend of mine; just an obscure officer on an obscure ship of the Special Patrol Service.

And yet there is a people who owe to him their very existence.

I wonder if they have forgotten him? It would not surprise me.

The memory of the universe is not a reliable thing.

Anderson Croy was, like most of the officer personnel of the Special Patrol Service, a native of Earth.

They had tried to make a stoop-shouldered dabbler in formulas out of him, but he was not the stuff from which good scientists are moulded. He was young, when I first knew him, and strong; he had mild blue eyes and a quick smile. And he had a fine, steely courage that a man could love.

I was in command, then, of the *Ertak*, my second ship. I inherited Anderson Croy with the ship, and I liked him from the first time I laid eyes upon him.

As I recall it, we worked together on the *Ertak* for nearly two years, Earth time. We went through some tight places together. I remember our experience, shortly after I took over the *Ertak*, on the monstrous planet Callor, whose tiny, gentle people were attacked by strange, vapid Things that come down upon them from the fastness of the polar cap, and—

But I wander from the story I wish to tell here. An old man's mind is a weak and weary thing that totters and weaves from side to side; like a worn-out ship, it is hard to keep on a straight course.

We were out on one of those long, monotonous patrols, skirting the outer boundaries of the known universe, that were, at that time, before the building of all the many stations we have to-day a dreaded part of the Special Patrol Service routine.

Not once had we landed to stretch our legs. Slowing up to atmospheric speed took time, and we were on a schedule that allowed for no waste of even minutes. We approached the various worlds only close enough to report, and to receive an assurance that all was well. A dog's life, but part of the game.

My log showed nearly a hundred "All's well" reports, as I remember it, when we slid up to Antri, which was, so far as size is concerned, one of our smallest ports o' call.

Antri, I might add, for the benefit of those who have forgotten their maps of the universe, is a satellite of A-411, which, in turn, is one of the largest bodies of the universe, and both uninhabited and uninhabitable. Antri is somewhat larger than the moon, Earth's satellite, and considerably farther from its controlling

body.

“Report our presence, Mr. Croy,” I ordered wearily.

“And please ask Mr. Correy to keep a sharp watch on the attraction meter.” These huge bodies such as A-411 are not pleasant companions at space speeds. A few minute’s trouble—space ships gave trouble, in those days—and you melted like a drop of solder when you struck the atmospheric belt.

“Yes, sir!” There never was a crisper young officer than Croy.

I bent over my tables, working out our position and charting our course for the next period. In a few seconds Croy was back, his blue eyes gleaming.

“Sir, an emergency is reported on Antri. We are to make all possible speed, to Oreo, their governing city. I gather that it is very important.”

“Very well, Mr. Croy.” I can’t say the news was unwelcome. Monotony kills young men. “Have the disintegrator ray generators inspected and tested.

Turn out the watch below in such time that we may have all hands on duty when we arrive. If there is an emergency, we shall be prepared for it. I shall be with Mr. Correy in the navigating room; if there are any further communications, relay them to me there.”

I hurried up to the navigating room, and gave Correy his orders.

“Do not reduce speed until it is absolutely necessary,” I concluded. “We have an emergency call from Antri, and minutes may be important. How long do you make it to Oreo?”

“About an hour to the atmosphere; say an hour more to set down in the city. I believe that’s about right, sir.”

I nodded, frowning at the twin charts, with their softly glowing lights, and turned to the television disc, picking up Antri without difficulty.

Of course, back in those days we had the huge and cumbersome discs, their faces shielded by a hood,

that would be suitable only for museum pieces now. But they did their work very well, and I searched Antri carefully, at varying ranges, for any sign of disturbances. I found none.

The dark portion, of course, I could not penetrate. Antri has one portion of its face that is turned forever from its sun, and one half that is bathed in perpetual light. The long twilight zone was uninhabited, for the people of Antri are a sun-loving race, and their cities and villages appeared only in the bright areas of perpetual sunlight.

Just as we reduced to atmospheric speed, Croy sent up a message

“The Governing Council sends word that we are to set down on the platform atop the Hall of Government, the large, square white building in the center of the city. They say we will have no difficulty in locating it.”

I thanked him and ordered him to stand by for further messages, if any, and picked up the far-flung city of Oreo in my television disc.

There was no mistaking the building Croy had mentioned. It stood out from the city around it, cool and white, its mighty columns glistening like crystal in the sun. I could even make out the landing platform, slightly elevated above the roof on spidery arches of silvery metal.

We sped straight for the city at just a fraction of space speed, but the hand of the surface temperature gauge crept slowly toward the red line that marked the dangerous incandescent point. I saw that Correy, like the good navigating officer he was, was watching the gauge as closely as myself, and hence said nothing. We both knew that the Antrians would not have sent a call for help to a ship of the Special Patrol Service if there had not been a real emergency.

Correy had made a good guess in saying that it would take about an hour, after entering the gaseous envelope of Antri, to reach our destination. It was just a few minutes—Earth time, of course—less than that when we settled gently onto the landing platform.

A group of six or seven Antrians, dignified old men,

wearing the short, loosely belted white robes that we found were their universal costume, were waiting for us at the exit of the *Ertak*, whose sleek, smooth sides were glowing dull red.

“You have hastened, and that is well, sirs,” said the spokesman of the committee. “You find Antri in dire need.” He spoke in the universal language, and spoke it softly and perfectly. “But you will pardon me for greeting you with that which is, of necessity, uppermost in my mind, and in the minds of these, my companions.

“Permit me to welcome you to Antri, and to introduce those who extend those greetings.” Rapidly, he ran through a list of names, and each of the men bowed gravely in acknowledgment of our greetings. I have never observed a more courteous nor a more courtly people than the Antrians; their manners are as beautiful as their faces.

Last of all, their spokesman introduced himself. Bori Tulber, he was called, and he had the honor of being master of the Council—the chief executive of Antri.

When the introductions had been completed, the committee led our little party to a small, cylindrical elevator which dropped us, swiftly and silently, on a cushion of air, to the street level of the great building. Across a wide, gleaming corridor our conductors led us, and stood aside before a massive portal through which ten men might have walked abreast.

We found ourselves in a great chamber with a vaulted ceiling of bright, gleaming metal. At the far end of the room was an elevated rostrum, flanked on either side by huge, intricate masses of statuary, of some creamy, translucent stone that glowed as with some inner light. Semicircular rows of seats, each with its carved desk, surmounted by numerous electrical controls, occupied all the floor space. None of the seats was occupied.

“We have excused the Council from our preliminary deliberations,” explained Bori Tulber, “because such a large body is unwieldy. My companions and myself represent the executive heads of the various departments of the Council, and we are empowered to act.” He led us through the great council chamber,

and into an anteroom, beautifully decorated, and furnished with exceedingly comfortable chairs.

“Be seated, sirs,” the Master of the Council suggested. We obeyed silently, and Bori Tulber stood before, gazing thoughtfully into space.

“I do not know just where to begin,” he said slowly. “You men in uniform know, I presume, but little of this world of ours. I presume I had best begin far back.

“Since you are navigators of space, undoubtedly, you are acquainted with the fact that Antri is a world divided into two parts; one of perpetual night, and the other of perpetual day, due to the fact that Antri revolves but once upon its axis during the course of its circuit of its sun, thus presenting always the same face to our luminary.

“We have no day and night, such as obtain on other spheres. There are no set hours for working nor for sleeping nor for pleasure. The measure of a man’s work is the measure of his ambition, or his strength, or his desire. It is so also with his sleep and with his

pleasures. It is—it has been—a very pleasant arrangement.

“Ours is a fertile country, and our people live very long and very happily with little effort. We have believed that ours was the nearest of all the worlds to the ideal; that nothing could disturb the peace and happiness of our people. We were mistaken.

“There is a dark side to Antri. A side upon which the sun never has shone. A dismal place of gloom, which is like the night upon other worlds.

“No Antrian has, to our knowledge, ever penetrated this part of Antri, and lived to tell of his experience. We do not even till the land close to the twilight zone. Why should we, when we have so much fine land upon which the sun shines bright and fair always, save for the two brief seasons of rain?

“We have never given thought to what might be on the dark face of Antri. Darkness and night are things unknown to us; we know of them only from the knowledge which has come to us from other worlds.

And now—now we have been brought face to face with a terrible danger which comes to us from that other side of this sphere.

“A people have grown there. A terrible people that I shall not try to describe to you. They threaten us with slavery, with extinction. Four ara ago (the Antrians have their own system of reckoning time, just as we have on Earth, instead of using the universal system, based upon the enaro. An ara corresponds to about fifty hours, Earth time.) we did not know that such a people existed. Now their shadow is upon all our beautifully sunny country, and unless you can aid us, before other help can reach us, I am convinced that Antri is doomed!”

For a moment not one of us spoke. We sat there, staring at the old man who had just ceased speaking.

Only a man ripened and seasoned with the passing of years could have stood there before us and uttered, so quietly and solemnly, words such as had just come from his lips. Only in his eyes could we catch a glimpse of the torment which gripped his soul.

“Sir,” I said, and have never felt younger than at that moment, when I tried to frame some assurance to this splendid old man who had turned to me and my youthful crew for succor, “we shall do what it lies within our power to do. But tell us more of this danger which threatens.

“I am no man of science, and yet I cannot see how men could live in a land never reached by the sun. There would be no heat, no vegetation. Is that not so?”

“Would that it were!” replied the Master of the Council, bitterly. “What you say would be indeed the truth, were it not for the great river and seas of our sunny Antri, which bear their heated waters to this dark portion of our world, and make it habitable.

“And as for this danger, there is little to be said. At some time, men of our country, men who fish, or venture upon the water in commerce, have been borne, all unwillingly, across the shadowy twilight zone and into the land of darkness. They did not come back, but they were found there and despoiled of

their menores.

“Somehow, these creatures who dwell in darkness determined the use of the menore, and now that they have resolved that they shall rule all this sphere, they have been able to make their threat clear to us. Perhaps”—and Bori Tulber smiled faintly and terribly —“you would like to have that message direct from its bearer?”

“Is that possible, sir?” I asked eagerly, glancing around the room. “How—”

“Come with me,” said the Master of the Council gently. “Alone—for too many near him excites this terrible messenger. You have your menore?”

“No. I had not thought there would be need of it.” The menores of those days, it should be remembered, were heavy, cumbersome circlets that were worn upon the head like a sort of crown, and one did not go so equipped unless in real need of the device. To-day, of course, your menores are but jeweled trinkets that convey thought a score of times more effectively, and

weigh but a tenth as much.

“It is a lack easily remedied.” Bori Tulber excused himself with a little bow and hurried out into the great council chamber, to appear again in a moment with a menore in either hand.

“Now, if your companions and mine will excuse us for a moment....” He smiled around the seated group apologetically. There was a murmur of assent, and the old man opened a door in the other side of the room.

“It is not far,” he said. “I will go first, and show you the way.”

He led me quickly down a long, narrow corridor to a pair of steep stairs that circled far down into the very foundation of the building. The walls of the corridor and the stairs were without windows, but were as bright as noonday from the ethon tubes which were set into both ceiling and walls.

Silently we circled our way down the spiral stairs, and silently the Master of the Council paused before a

door at the bottom—a door of dull red metal.

“This is the keeping place of those who come before the Council charged with wrong doing,” explained Bori Tulber. His fingers rested upon and pressed certain of a ring of small white buttons in the face of the door, and it opened swiftly and noiselessly. We entered, and the door closed behind us with a soft thud.

“Behold one of those who live in the darkness,” said the Master of the Council grimly. “Do not put on the menore until you have a grip upon yourself: I would not have him know how greatly he disturbs us.”

I nodded, dumbly, holding the heavy menore dangling in my hand.

I have said that I have beheld strange worlds and strange people in my life, and it is true that I have. I have seen the headless people of that red world Iralo, the ant people, the dragon-fly people, the terrible carnivorous trees of L-472, and the pointed heads of a people who live upon a world which may not be

named. But I have still to see a more terrible creature than that which lay before me now.

He—or it—was reclining upon the floor, for the reason that he could not have stood. No room save one with a vaulted ceiling such as the great council chamber, could offer room enough for this creature to walk erect.

He was, roughly, a shade better than twice my height, yet I believe he would have weighed but little more. You have seen rank weeds that have grown up in the darkness to reach the sun; if you can imagine a man who had done likewise, you can, perhaps, picture that which I saw before me.

His legs at the thigh were no larger than my arm, and his arms were but half the size of my wrist, and jointed twice instead of but once. He wore a careless garment of some dirty yellow, shaggy hide, and his skin, revealed on feet and arms and face, was a terrible, bloodless white; the dead white of a fish's belly. Maggot white. The white of something that had never known the sun.

The head was small and round, with features that were a caricature of man's. His ears were huge, and had the power of movement, for they cocked forward as we entered the room. The nose was not prominently arched, but the nostrils were wide, and very thin, as was his mouth, which was faintly tinged with dusky blue, instead of healthy red. At one time his eyes had been nearly round, and, in proportion, very large. Now they were but shadowy pockets, mercifully covered by shrunken, wrinkled lids that twitched but did not lift.

He moved as we entered, and from a reclining position, propped up on the double elbows of one spidery arm, he changed to a sitting position that brought his head nearly to the ceiling. He smiled sickeningly, and a queer, sibilant whispering came from the bluish lips.

"That is his way of talking," explained Bori Tulber. "His eyes, you will note, have been gouged out. They cannot stand the light; they prepared their messenger carefully for his work, you'll see."

He placed his menore upon his head, and motioned me to do likewise. The creature searched the floor with one white, leathery hand, and finally located his menore, which he adjusted clumsily.

“You will have to be very attentive,” explained my companion. “He expresses himself in terms of pictures only, of course, and his is not a highly developed mind. I shall try to get him to go over the entire story for us again, if I can make him understand. Emanate nothing yourself; he is easily confused.”

I nodded silently, my eyes fixed with a sort of fascination upon the creature from the darkness, and waited.

Back on the *Ertak* again. I called all my officers together for a conference.

“Gentlemen,” I said, “we are confronted with a problem of such gravity that I doubt my ability to describe it clearly.

“Briefly, this civilized, beautiful portion of Antri is menaced by a terrible fate. In the dark portion of this unhappy world there live a people who have the lust of conquest in their hearts—and the means at hand with which to wreck this world of perpetual sunlight.

“I have the ultimatum of this people direct from their messenger. They want a terrible tribute in the form of slaves. These slaves would have to live in perpetual darkness, and wait upon the whims of the most monstrous beings these eyes of mine have ever seen. And the number of slaves demanded would—as nearly as I could gather, mean about a third of the entire population. Further tribute in the form of sufficient food to support these slaves is also demanded.”

“But, in God’s name, sir,” burst forth Croy, his eyes blazing, “by what means do they, propose to inforce their infamous demands?”

“By the power of darkness—and a terrible cataclysm. Their wise men—and it would seem that some of them are not unversed in science—have discovered a way to unbalance this world, so that they can cause

darkness to creep over this land that has never known it. And as darkness advances, these people of the sun will be utterly helpless before a race that loves darkness, and can see in it like cats. That, gentlemen, is that fate which confronts this world of Antri!”

There was a ghastly silence for a moment, and then Croy, always impetuous, spoke up again.

“How do they propose to do this thing sir?”, he asked hoarsely.

“With devilish simplicity. They have a great canal dug nearly to the great polar cap of ice. Should they complete it, the hot waters of their seas will be liberated upon this vast ice field, and the warm waters will melt it quickly. If you have not forgotten your lessons, gentlemen, you will remember, since most of you are of Earth, that our scientists tell us our own world turned over in much this same fashion, from natural means, and established for itself new poles. Is that not true?”

Grave, almost frightened nods travelled around the

little semicircle of white, thoughtful faces.

“And is there nothing, sir, that we can do?” asked Kincaide, my second officer, in an awed whisper.

“That is the purpose of this conclave: to determine what may be done. We have our bombs and our rays, it is true, but what is the power of this one ship against the people of half a world? And such a people!” I shuddered, despite myself, at the memory of that grinning creature in the cell far below the floor of the council chamber. “This city, and its thousands, we might save, it is true—but not the whole half of this world. And that is the task the Council and its Master have set before us.”

“Would it be possible to frighten them?” asked Croy. “I gather that they are not an advanced race. Perhaps a show of power—the rays—the atomic pistol—bombs — Call it strategy, sir, or just plain bluff. It seems the only chance.”

“You have heard the suggestion, gentlemen,” I said. “Has anyone a better?”

“How does Mr. Croy plan to frighten these people of the darkness?” asked Kincaide, who was always practical.

“By going to their country, in this ship, and then letting events take their course,” replied Croy promptly. “Details will have to be settled on the spot, as I see it.”

“I believe Mr. Croy is right,” I decided. “The messenger of these people must be returned to his own kind; the sooner the better. He has given me a mental map of his country; I believe that it will be possible for me to locate the principal city, in which his ruler lives. We will take him there, and then—may God aid us gentlemen.”

“Amen,” nodded Croy, and the echo of the word ran from lip to lip like the prayer it was. “When do we start?”

I hesitated for just an instant.

“Now,” I brought forth crisply. “Immediately. We are

gambling with the fate of a world, a fine and happy people. Let us throw the dice quickly, for the strain of waiting will not help us. Is that as you would wish it, gentlemen?"

"It is, sir!" came the grave chorus.

"Very well. Mr. Croy, please report with a detail of ten men, to Bori Tulber, and tell him of our decision. Bring the messenger back with you. The rest of you, gentlemen, to your stations. Make any preparations you may think advisable. Be sure that every available exterior light is in readiness. Let me be notified the moment the messenger is on board and we are ready to take off. Thank you, gentlemen!"

I hastened to my quarters and brought the *Ertak's* log down to the minute, explaining in detail the course of action we had decided upon, and the reasons for it. I knew, as did all the *Ertak's* officers who had saluted so crisply, and so coolly gone about the business of carrying out my orders, that we would return from our trip to the dark side of Antri triumphant or—not at all.

Even in these soft days, men still respect the stern, proud motto of our service: "Nothing Less Than Complete Success." The Special Patrol does what it is ordered to do, or no man returns to present excuses. That is a tradition to bring tears of pride to the eyes of even an old man, in whose hands there is strength only for the wielding of a pen. And I was young, in those days.

It was perhaps a quarter of an hour when word came from the navigating room that the messenger was aboard, and we were ready to depart. I closed the log, wondering, I remember, if I would ever make another entry therein, and, if not, whether the words I had just inscribed would ever see the light of day. The love of life is strong in men so young. Then I hurried to the navigating room and took charge.

Bori Tulber had furnished me with large scale maps of the daylight portion of Antri. From the information conveyed to me by the messenger of the people of darkness—the Chisee they called themselves, as nearly as I could get the sound—I rapidly sketched in the map of the other side of Antri, locating their

principal city with a small black circle.

Realising that the location of the city we sought was only approximate, we did not bother to work out exact bearings. We set the *Ertak* on her course at a height of only a few thousand feet, and set out at low atmospheric speed, anxiously watching for the dim line of shadow that marked the twilight zone, and the beginning of what promised to be the last mission of the *Ertak* and every man she carried within her smooth, gleaming body.

“Twilight zone in view, sir,” reported Croy at length.

“Thank you, Mr. Croy. Have all the exterior lights and searchlights turned on. Speed and course as at present, for the time being.”

I picked up the twilight zone without difficulty in the television disc, and at full power examined the terrain.

The rich crops that fairly burst from the earth of the sunlit portion of Antri were not to be observed here.

The Antrians made no effort to till this ground, and I doubt that it would have been profitable to do so, even had they wished to come so close to the darkness they hated.

The ground seemed dank, and great dark slugs moved heavily upon its greasy surface. Here and there strange pale growths grew in patches—twisted, spotted growths that seemed somehow unhealthy and poisonous.

I searched the country ahead, pressing further and further into the line of darkness that was swiftly approaching. As the light of the sun faded, our monstrous searchlights cut into the gloom ahead, their great beams slashing the shadows.

In the dark country I had expected to find little if any vegetable growth. Instead, I found that it was a veritable jungle through which even our searchlight rays could not pass.

How tall the growths of this jungle might be, I could not tell, yet I had the feeling that they were tall

indeed. They were not trees, these pale, weedy arms that reached towards the dark sky. They were soft and pulpy, and without leaves; just long naked sickly arms that divided and subdivided and ended in little smooth stumps like amputated limbs.

That there was some kind of activity within the shelter of this weird jungle, was evident enough, for I could catch glimpses, now and then of moving things. But what they might be, even the searching eye of the television disc could not determine.

One of our searchlight beams, waving through the darkness like the curious antenna of some monstrous insect, came to rest upon a spot far ahead. I followed the beam with the disc, and bent closer, to make sure my eyes did not deceive me.

I was looking at a vast cleared place in the pulpy jungle—a cleared space in the center of which there was a city.

A city built of black, sweating stone, each house exactly like every other house: tall, thin slices of

stone, without windows, chimneys or ornamentation of any kind. The only break in the walls was the slit-like door of each house. Instead of being arranged along streets crossing each other at right angles, these houses were built in concentric circles broken only by four narrow streets then ran from the open space in the center of the city to the four points of the compass. Around the entire city was an exceedingly high wall built of and buttressed with the black, sweating stone of which the houses were constructed.

That it was a densely populated city there was ample evidence. People—they were creatures like the messenger; that the Chisee are a people, despite their terrible shape, is hardly debatable—were running up and down the four radial streets, and around the curved connecting streets, in the wildest confusion, their double-elbowed arms flung across their eyes. But even as I watched, the crowd thinned and melted swiftly away, until the streets of the queer, circular city were utterly deserted.

“The city ahead is not the one we are seeking, sir?” asked Croy, who had evidently been observing the

scene through one of the smaller television discs. "I take it that governing city will be farther in the interior."

"According to my rather sketchy information, yes." I replied. "However, keep all the searchlight operators busy, going over very bit of the country within the reach of their beams. You have men on all the auxiliary television discs?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Any findings of interest should be reported to me instantly. And—Mr. Croy!"

"Yes, sir?"

"You might order, if you will, that rations be served all men at their posts." Over such country as this, I felt it would be wise to have every man ready for an emergency. It was, perhaps, as well that I issued this order.

It was perhaps half an hour after we had passed the

circular city when, far ahead, I could see the pale, unhealthy forest thinning out. A half dozen of our searchlight beams played upon the denuded area, and as I brought the television disc to bear I saw that we were approaching a vast swamp, in which little pools of black water reflected the dazzling light of our searching beams.

Nor was this all. Out of the swamp a thousand strange, winged things were rising: yellowish, bat-like things with forked tails and fierce hooked beaks. And like some obscene miasma from that swamp, they rose and came straight for the *Ertak*!

Instantly I pressed the attention signal that warned every man on the ship.

“All disintegrator rays in action at once!” I barked into the transmitter. “Broad beams, and full energy. Bird-like creatures, dead ahead; do not cease action until ordered!”

I heard the disintegrator ray generators deepen their notes before I finished speaking, and I smiled grimly,

turning to Correy.

“Slow down as quickly and as much as possible, Mr. Correy,” I ordered. “We have work to do ahead.”

He nodded, and gave the order to the operating room; I felt the forward surge that told me my order was being obeyed, and turned my attention again to the television disc.

The ray operators were doing their work well. The search lights showed the air streaked with fine siftings of greasy dust, and these strange winged creatures were disappearing by the scores as the disintegrator rays beat and played upon them.

But they came on gamely, fiercely. Where there had been thousands, there were but hundreds ... scores ... dozens....

There were only five left. Three of them disappeared at once, but the two remaining came on unhesitatingly, their dirty yellow bat-like wings flapping heavily, their naked heads outstretched, and

hooked beaks snapping.

One of them disappeared in a little sifting of greasy dust, and the same ray dissolved one wing of the remaining creature. He turned over suddenly, the one good wing flapping wildly, and tumbled towards the waiting swamp that has spawned him. Then, as the ray eagerly followed him, the last of that hellish brood disappeared.

“Circle slowly, Mr. Correy,” I ordered. I wanted to make sure there were none of these terrible creatures left. I felt that nothing so terrible should be left alive—even in a world of darkness.

Through the television disc I searched the swamp. As I had half suspected, the filthy ooze held the young of this race of things: grub-like creatures that flipped their heavy bodies about in the slime, alarmed by the light which searched them out.

“All disintegrator rays on the swamp,” I ordered.
“Sweep it from margin to margin. Let nothing be left alive there.”

I had a well trained crew. The disintegrator rays massed themselves into a marching wall of death, and swept up and down the swamp as a plough turns its furrows.

It was easy to trace their passage, for behind them the swamp disappeared, leaving in its stead row after row of broad, dusty paths. When we had finished there was no swamp: there was only a naked area upon which nothing lived, and upon which, for many years, nothing would grow.

“Good work,” I commended the disintegrator ray men. “Cease action.” And then, to Correy, “Put her on her course again, please.”

An hour went by. We passed several more of the strange, damp circular cities, differing from the first we had seen only in the matter of size. Another hour passed, and I became anxious. If we were on our proper course, and I had understood the Chisee messenger correctly, we should be very close to the governing city. We should—

The waving beam of one of the searchlights came suddenly to rest. Three or four other beams followed it—and then all the others.

“Large city to port, sir!” called Croy excitedly.

“Thank you. I believe it is our destination. Cut all searchlights except the forward beam. Mr. Correy!”

“Yes, sir.”

“You can take her over visually now, I believe. The forward searchlight beam will keep our destination in view for you. Set her down cautiously in the center of the city in any suitable place. And—remain at the controls ready for any orders, and have the operating room crew do likewise.”

“Yes, sir,” said Correy crisply.

With a tenseness I could not control, I bent over the hooded television disc and studied the mighty governing city of the Chisee.

The governing city of the Chisee was not unlike the others we had seen, save that it was very much larger, and had eight spoke-like streets radiating from its center, instead of four. The protective wall was both thicker and higher.

There was another difference. Instead of a great open space in the center of the city, there was a central, park-like space, in the middle of which was a massive pile, circular in shape, and built, like all the rest of the city, of the black, sweating rock which seemed to be the sole building material of the Chisee.

We set the *Ertak* down close to the big circular building, which we guessed—and correctly—to be the seat of government. I ordered the searchlight ray to be extinguished the moment we landed, and the ethon tubes that illuminated our ship inside to be turned off, so that we might accustom our eyes as much as possible to darkness, finding our way about with small ethon tube flashlights.

With a small guard, I stood at the forward exit of the *Ertak* and watched the huge circular door back out on

its mighty threads, and finally swing to one side on its massive gimbals. Croy—the only officer with me—and I both wore our menores, and carried full expeditionary equipment, as did the guard.

The Chisee messenger, grimacing and talking excitedly in his sibilant, whispering voice, crouched on all fours (he could not stand in that small space) and waited, three men of the guard on either side of him. I placed his minore on his head and gave him simple, forceful orders, picturing them for him as best I could:

“Go from this place and find others of your kind. Tell them that we would speak to them with things such as you have upon your head. Run swiftly!”

“I will run,” he conveyed to me, “to those great ones who sent me.” He pictured them fleetingly. They were creatures like himself, save that they were elaborately dressed in fine skins of several pale colors, and wore upon their arms, between their two elbows, broad circlets of carved metal which I took to be emblems of power or authority, since the chief of them all wore a

very broad band. Their faces were much more intelligent than their messenger had led me to expect, and their eyes, very large and round, and not at all human, were the eyes of thoughtful, reasoning creatures.

Doubled on all fours, the Chisee crept through the circular exit, and straightened up. As he did so, from out of the darkness a score or more of his fellows rushed up, gathering around him, and blocking the exit with their reedy legs. We could hear than talking excitedly in high-pitched, squeaky whispers. Then, suddenly I received an expression from the Chisee who wore the minore:

“Those who are with me have come from those in power. They say one of you, and one only, is to come with us to our big men who will learn, through a thing such as I wear upon my head, that which you wish to say to them. You are to come quickly; at once.”

“I will come,” I replied. “Have those with you make way—”

A heavy hand fell upon my shoulder; a voice spoke eagerly in my ear:

“Sir, you must not go!” It was Croy, and his voice shook with feeling. “You are in command of the *Ertak*; she, and those in her need you. Let me go! I insist, sir!”

I turned in the darkness, quickly and angrily.

“Mr. Croy,” I said swiftly, “do you realize that you are speaking to your commanding officer?”

I felt his grip tighten on my arm as the reproof struck home.

“Yes, sir,” he said doggedly. “I do. But I repeat that your duty commands you to remain here.”

“The duty of a commander in this Service leads him to the place of greatest danger, Mr. Croy,” I informed him.

“Then stay with your ship, sir!” he pleaded, craftily.

“This may be some trick to get you away, so that they may attack us. Please! Can’t you see that I am right, sir?”

I thought swiftly. The earnestness of the youngster had touched me. Beneath the formality and the “sirs” there was a real affection between us.

In the darkness I reached for his hand; I found it and shook it solemnly—a gesture of Earth which it is hard to explain. It means many things.

“Go, then, Andy,” I said softly. “But do not stay long. An hour at the longest. If you are not back in that length of time, we’ll come after you, and whatever else may happen, you can be sure that you will be well avenged. The *Ertak* has not lost her stinger.”

“Thank you, John,” he replied. “Remember that I shall wear my menore. If I adjust it to full power, and you do likewise, and stand without the shelter of the *Ertak’s* metal hull, I shall be able to communicate with you, should there be any danger.” He pressed my hand again, and strode through the exit out into the

darkness, which was lit only by a few distant stars.

The long, slim legs closed in around him; like a pigmy guarded by the skeletons of giants he was led quickly away.

The minutes dragged by. There was a nervous tension on the ship, the like of which I have experienced not more than a dozen times in all my years.

No one spoke aloud. Now and again one man would matter uneasily to another; there would be a swift, muttered response, and silence again. We were waiting—waiting.

Ten minutes went by. Twenty. Thirty.

Impatiently I paced up and down before the exit, the guards at their posts, ready to obey any orders instantly.

Forty-five minutes. I walked through the exit; stepped out onto the cold, hard earth.

I could see, behind me, the shadowy bulk of the *Ertak*. Before me, a black, shapeless blot against the star-sprinkled sky, was the great administrative building of the Chisee. And in there, somewhere, was Anderson Croy. I glanced down at the luminous dial of my watch. Fifty minutes. In ten minutes more—

“John Hanson!” My name reached me, faintly but clearly, through the medium of my menore. “This is Croy. Do you understand me?”

“Yes,” I replied instantly. “Are you safe?”

“I am safe. All is well. Very well. Will you promise me now to receive what I am about to send, without interruption?”

“Yes,” I replied, thoughtlessly and eagerly. “What is it?”

“I have had a long conference with the chief or head of the Chisee,” explained Croy rapidly. “He is very intelligent, and his people are much further advanced than we thought.

“Through some form of communication, he has learned of the fight with the weird birds; it seems that they are—or were—the most dreaded of all the creatures of this dark world. Apparently we got the whole brood of them, and this chief, whose name, I gather, is Wieschien, or something like that, is naturally much impressed.

“I have given him a demonstration or two with my atomic pistol and the flashlight—these people are fairly stricken by a ray of light directly in the eyes—and we have reached very favorable terms.

“I am to remain here as chief bodyguard and adviser, of which he has need, for all is not peaceful, I gather, in this kingdom of darkness. In return, he is to give up his plans to subjugate the rest of Antri; he has sworn to do this by what is evidently, to him, a very sacred oath, witnessed solemnly by the rest of his council.

“Under the circumstances, I believe he will do what he says; in any case, the great canal will be filled in, and the Antrians will have plenty of time to erect a great series of disintegrator ray stations along the

entire twilight zone, using the broad fan rays to form a solid wall against which the Chisee could not advance even did they, at some future date, carry out their plans. The worst possible result then would be that the people in the sunlit portion would have to migrate from certain sections, and perhaps would have day and night, alternately, as do other worlds.

“This is the agreement we have reached; it is the only one that will save this world. Do you approve, sir?”

“No! Return immediately, and we will show the Chisee that they cannot hold an officer of the Special Patrol as a hostage. Make haste!”

“It’s no go, sir,” came the reply instantly. “I threatened them first. I explained what our disintegrator rays would do, and Wieschien laughed at me.

“This city is built upon great subterranean passages that lead to many hidden exits. If we show the least sign of hostility the work will be resumed on the canal, and, before we can locate the spot, and stop

the work, the damage will be done.

“This is our only chance, sir, to make this expedition a complete success. Permit me to judge this fact from the evidence I have before me. Whatever sacrifice there is to make, I make gladly. Wieschien asks that you depart at once, and in peace, and I know this is the only course. Good-by, sir; convey my salutations to my other friends upon the old *Ertak*, and elsewhere. And now, lest my last act as an officer of the Special Patrol Service be to refuse to obey the commands of my superior officer, I am removing the minore. Good-by!”

I tried to reach him again, but there was no response.

Gone! He was gone! Swallowed up in darkness and in silence!

Dazed, shaken to the very foundation of my being, I stood there between the shadowy bulk of the *Ertak* and the towering mass of the great silent pile that

was the seat of government in this strange land of darkness, and gazed up at the dark sky above me. I am not ashamed, now, to say that hot tears trickled down my cheeks, nor that as I turned back to the *Ertak*, my throat was so gripped by emotion that I could not speak.

I ordered the exit closed with a wave of my hand; in the navigating room I said but four words: “We depart at once.”

At the third meal of the day I gathered my officers about me and told them, as quickly and as gently as I could, of the sacrifice one of their number had made.

It was Kincaide who, when I had finished, rose slowly and made reply.

“Sir,” he said quietly, “We had a friend. Some day, he might have died. Now he will live forever in the records of the Service, in the memory of a world, and in the hearts of those who had the honor to serve with him. Could he—or we—wish more?”

Amid a strange silence he sat down again, and there was not an eye among us that was dry.

I hope that the snappy young officer who visited me the other day reads this little account of bygone times.

Perhaps it will make clear to him how we worked, in those nearly forgotten days, with the tools we had at hand. They were not the perfect tools of to-day, but what they lacked, we somehow made up.

That fine old motto of the Service, "Nothing Less Than Complete Success," we passed on unsullied to those who came after us.

I hope these youngsters of to-day may do as well.

#65 The Sunken Empire, By Harold Thompson Rich:

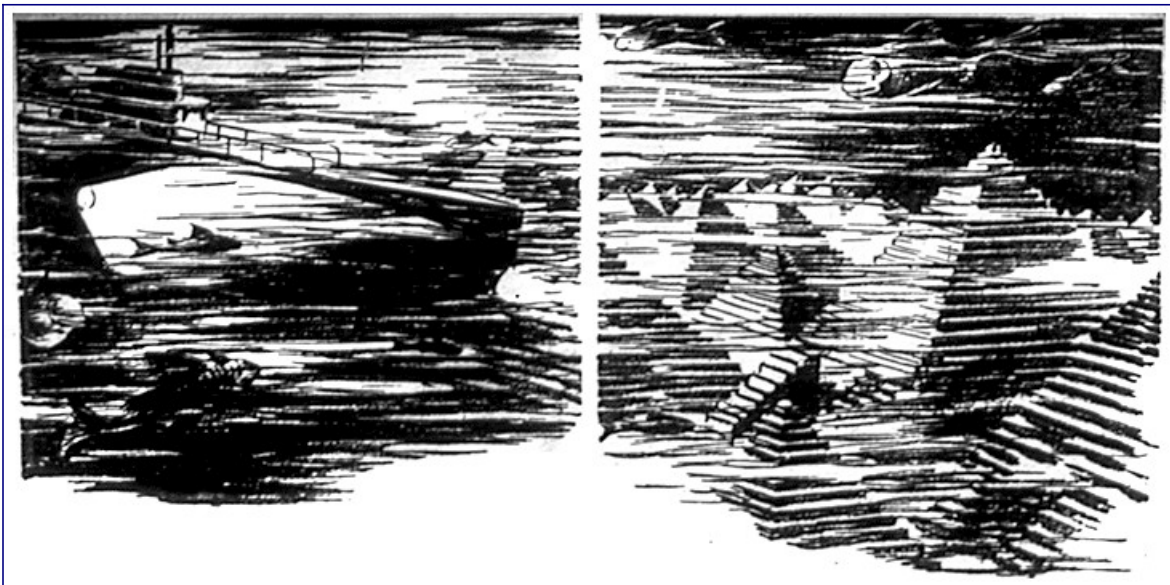
Concerning the strange adventures of Professor Stevens with the Antillians on the floor of the mysterious Sargasso Sea.

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

tilted her rudders and dove



- - -

“Then you really expect to find the lost continent of Atlantis, Professor?”

Martin Stevens lifted his bearded face sternly to the reporter who was interviewing him in his study aboard the torpedo-submarine *Nereid*, a craft of his own invention, as she lay moored at her Brooklyn wharf, on an afternoon in October.

“My dear young man,” he said, “I am not even going to look for it.”

The aspiring journalist—Larry Hunter by name—was properly abashed.

“But I thought,” he insisted nevertheless, “that you said you were going to explore the ocean floor under the Sargasso Sea?”

“And so I did.” Professor Stevens admitted, a smile moving that gray beard now and his blue eyes twinkling merrily. “But the Sargasso, an area almost

equal to Europe, covers other land as well—land of far more recent submergence than Atlantis, which foundered in 9564 B. C., according to Plato. What I am going to look for is this newer lost continent, or island rather—namely, the great island of Antillia, of which the West Indies remain above water to-day.”

“Antillia?” queried Larry Hunter, wonderingly. “I never heard of it.”

Again the professor regarded his interviewer sternly.

“There are many things you have never heard of, young man,” he told him. “Antillia may be termed the missing link between Atlantis and America. It was there that Atlantean culture survived after the appalling catastrophe that wiped out the Atlantean homeland, with its seventy million inhabitants, and it was in the colonies the Antillians established in Mexico and Peru, that their own culture in turn survived, after Antillia too had sunk.”

“My Lord! You don’t mean to say the Mayas and Incas originated on that island of Antillia?”

“No, I mean to say they originated on the continent of Atlantis, and that Antillia was the stepping stone to the New World, where they built the strange pyramids we find smothered in the jungle—even as thousands of years before the Atlanteans established colonies in Egypt and founded the earliest dynasties of pyramid-building Pharaohs.”

Larry was pushing his pencil furiously.

“Whew!” he gasped. “Some story, Professor!”

“To the general public, perhaps,” was the reply. “But to scholars of antiquity, these postulates are pretty well known and pretty well accepted. It remains but to get concrete evidence, in order to prove them to the world at large—and that is the object of my expedition.”

More hurried scribbling, then:

“But, say—why don’t you go direct to Atlantis and get the real dope?”

“Because that continent foundered so long ago that it is doubtful if any evidence would have withstood the ravages of time,” Professor Stevens explained, “whereas Antillia went down no earlier than 200 B. C., archaeologists agree.”

“That answers my question,” declared Larry, his admiration for this doughty graybeard rising momentarily. “And now, Professor, I wonder if you’d be willing to say a few words about this craft of yours?”

“Cheerfully, if you think it would interest anyone. What would you care to have me say?”

“Well, in the first place, what does the name *Nereid* mean?”

“Sea-nymph. The derivation is from the Latin and Greek, meaning daughter of the sea-god Nereus. Appropriate, don’t you think?”

“Swell. And why do you call it a torpedo-submarine? How does it differ from the common or navy variety?”

Professor Stevens smiled. It was like asking what was the difference between the sun and the moon, when about the only point of resemblance they had was that they were both round. Nevertheless, he enumerated some of the major modifications he had developed.

Among them, perhaps the most radical, was its motive power, which was produced by what he called a vacuo-turbine—a device that sucked in the water at the snout of the craft and expelled it at the tail, at the time purifying a certain amount for drinking purposes and extracting sufficient oxygen to maintain a healthful atmosphere while running submerged.

Then, the structure of the *Nereid* was unique, he explained, permitting it to attain depths where the pressure would crush an ordinary submarine, while mechanical eyes on the television principle afforded a view in all directions, and locks enabling them to leave the craft at will and explore the sea-bottom were provided.

This latter feat they would accomplish in special suits, designed on the same pneumatic principle as the

torpedo itself and capable of sustaining sufficient inflation to resist whatever pressures might be encountered, as well as being equipped with vibratory sending and receiving apparatus, for maintaining communication with those left aboard.

All these things and more Professor Stevens outlined, as Larry's pencil flew, admitting that he had spent the past ten years and the best part of his private fortune in developing his plans.

"But you'll get it all back, won't you? Aren't there all sorts of Spanish galleons and pirate barques laden with gold supposed to be down there?"

"Undoubtedly," was the calm reply. "But I am not on a treasure hunt, young man. If I find one single sign of former life, I shall be amply rewarded."

Whereupon the young reporter regarded the subject of his interview with fresh admiration, not unmingled with wonder. In his own hectic world, people had no such scorn of gold. Gee, he'd sure like to go along! The professor could have his old statues or whatever

he was looking for. As for himself, he'd fill up his pockets with Spanish doubloons and pieces of eight!

Larry was snapped out of his trance by a light knock on the door, which opened to admit a radiant girl in creamy knickers and green cardigan.

"May I come in, daddy?" she inquired, hesitating, as she saw he was not alone.

"You seem to be in already, my dear," the professor told her, rising from his desk and stepping forward.

Then, turning to Larry, who had also risen, he said:

"Mr. Hunter, this is my daughter, Diane, who is also my secretary."

"I am pleased to meet you, Miss Stevens," said Larry, taking her hand.

And he meant it—for almost anyone would have been pleased to meet Diane, with her tawny gold hair, warm olive cheeks and eyes bluer even than her

father's and just as twinkling, just as intelligent.

"She will accompany the expedition and take stenographic notes of everything we observe," added her father, to Larry's amazement.

"What?" he declared. "You mean to say that—that—"

"Of course he means to say that I'm going, if that's what you mean to say, Mr. Hunter," Diane assured him. "Can you think of any good reason why I shouldn't go, when girls are flying around the world and everything else?"

Even had Larry been able to think of any good reason, he wouldn't have mentioned it. But as a matter of fact, he had shifted quite abruptly to an entirely different line of thought. Diane, he was thinking—Diana, goddess of the chase, the huntress! And himself, Larry Hunter—the hunter and the huntress!

Gee, but he'd like to go! What an adventure, hunting around together on the bottom of the ocean!

What a wild dream, rather, he concluded when his senses returned. For after all, he was only a reporter, fated to write about other people's adventures, not to participate in them. So he put away his pad and pencil and prepared to leave.

But at the door he paused.

"Oh, yes—one more question. When are you planning to leave, Professor?"

At that, Martin Stevens and his daughter exchanged a swift glance. Then, with a smile, Diane said:

"I see no reason why we shouldn't tell him, daddy."

"But we didn't tell the reporters from the other papers, my dear," protested her father.

"Then suppose we give Mr. Hunter the exclusive story," she said, transferring her smile to Larry now. "It will be what you call a—a scoop. Isn't that it?"

"That's it."

She caught her father's acquiescing nod. "Then here's your scoop, Mr. Hunter. We leave to-night."

To-night! This was indeed a scoop! If he hurried, he could catch the late afternoon editions with it.

"I—I certainly thank you, Miss Stevens!" he exclaimed. "That'll make the front page!"

As he grasped the door-knob, he added, turning to her father:

"And I want to thank you too, Professor—and wish you good luck!"

Then, with a hasty handshake, and a last smile of gratitude for Diane, he flung open the door and departed, unconscious that two young blue eyes followed his broad shoulders wistfully till they disappeared from view.

But Larry was unaware that he had made a favorable impression on Diane. He felt it was the reverse. As he headed toward the subway, that vivid blond goddess

of the chase was uppermost in his thoughts.

Soon she'd be off in the *Nereid*, bound for the mysterious regions under the Sargasso Sea, while in a few moments he'd be in the subway, bound under the prosaic East River for New York.

No—damned if he would!

Suddenly, with a wild inspiration, the young reporter altered his course, dove into the nearest phone booth and got his city editor on the wire.

Scoop? This was just the first installment. He'd get a scoop that would fill a book!

And his city editor tacitly O. K.'d the idea.

With the result that when the *Nereid* drew away from her wharf that night, on the start of her unparalleled voyage, Larry Hunter was a stowaway.

The place where he had succeeded in secreting himself was a small storeroom far aft, on one of the

lower decks. There he huddled in the darkness, while the slow hours wore away, hearing only the low hum of the craft's vacuo-turbine and the flux of water running through her.

From the way she rolled and pitched, he judged she was still proceeding along on the surface.

Having eaten before he came aboard, he felt no hunger, but the close air and the dark quarters brought drowsiness. He slept.

When he awoke it was still dark, of course, but a glance at his luminous wrist-watch told him it was morning now. And the fact that the rolling and pitching had ceased made him believe they were now running submerged.

The urge for breakfast asserting itself, Larry drew a bar of chocolate from his pocket and munched on it. But this was scanty fare for a healthy young six-footer, accustomed to a liberal portion of ham and eggs. Furthermore, the lack of coffee made him realize that he was getting decidedly thirsty. The air, moreover,

was getting pretty bad.

“All in all, this hole wasn’t exactly intended for a bedroom!” he reflected with a wry smile.

Taking a chance, he opened the door a crack and sat there impatiently, while the interminable minutes ticked off.

The *Nereid’s* turbine was humming now with a high, vibrant note that indicated they must be knocking off the knots at a lively clip. He wondered how far out they were, and how far down.

Lord, there’d be a riot when he showed up! He wanted to wait till they were far enough on their way so it would be too much trouble to turn around and put him ashore.

But by noon his powers of endurance were exhausted. Flinging open the door, he stepped out into the corridor, followed it to a companionway and mounted the ladder to the deck above.

There he was assailed by a familiar and welcome odor—food!

Trailing it to its origin, he came to a pair of swinging doors at the end of a cork-paved passage. Beyond, he saw on peering through, was the mess-room, and there at the table, among a number of uniformed officers, sat Professor Stevens and Diane.

A last moment Larry stood there, looking in on them. Then, drawing a deep breath, he pushed wide the swinging doors and entered with a cheery:

“Good morning, folks! Hope I’m not too late for lunch!”

Varying degrees of surprise greeted this dramatic appearance. The officers stared, Diane gasped, her father leaped to his feet with a cry.

“That reporter! Why—why, what are you doing here, young man?”

“Just representing the press.”

Larry tried to make it sound nonchalant but he was finding it difficult to bear up under this barrage of disapproving eyes—particularly two very young, very blue ones.

“So that is the way you reward us for giving you an exclusive story, is it?” Professor Stevens’ voice was scathing. “A representative of the press! A stowaway, rather—and as such you will be treated!”

He turned to one of his officers.

“Report to Captain Petersen that we have a stowaway aboard and order him to put about at once.”

He turned to another.

“See that Mr. Hunter is taken below and locked up. When we reach New York, he will be handed over to the police.”

“But daddy!” protested Diane, as they rose to comply, her eyes softening now. “We shouldn’t be too severe with Mr. Hunter. After all, he is probably doing only

what his paper ordered him to.”

Gratefully Larry turned toward his defender. But he couldn't let that pass.

“No, I'm acting only on my own initiative,” he said.

“No one told me to come.”

For he couldn't get his city editor involved, and after all it was his own idea.

“You see!” declared Professor Stevens. “He admits it is his own doing. It is clear he has exceeded his authority, therefore, and deserves no sympathy.”

“But can't you let me stay, now that I'm here?” urged Larry. “I know something about boats. I'll serve as a member of the crew—anything.”

“Impossible. We have a full complement. You would be more of a hindrance than a help. Besides, I do not care to have the possible results of this expedition blared before the public.”

“I’ll write nothing you do not approve.”

“I have no time to edit your writings, young man. My own, will occupy me sufficiently. So it is useless. You are only wasting your breath—and mine.”

He motioned for his officers to carry out his orders.

But before they could move to do so, in strode a lean, middle-aged Norwegian Larry sensed must be Captain Petersen himself, and on his weathered face was an expression of such gravity that it was obvious to everyone something serious had happened.

Ignoring Larry, after one brief look of inquiry that was answered by Professor Stevens, he reported swiftly what he had to say.

While cruising full speed at forty fathoms, with kite-aerial out, their wireless operator had received a radio warning to turn back. Answering on its call-length, he had demanded to know the sender and the reason for the message, but the information had been declined, the warning merely being repeated.

“Was it a land station or a ship at sea?” asked the professor.

“Evidently the latter,” was the reply. “By our radio range-finder, we determined the position at approximately latitude 27, longitude 65.”

“But that, Captain, is in the very area we are headed for.”

“And that, Professor, makes it all the more singular.”

“But—well, well! This is indeed peculiar! And I had been on the point of turning back with our impetuous young stowaway. What would you suggest, sir?”

Captain Petersen meditated, while Larry held his breath.

“To turn back,” he said at length, in his clear, precise English, “would in my opinion be to give the laugh to someone whose sense of humor is already too well developed.”

“Exactly!” agreed Professor Stevens, as Larry relaxed in relief. “Whoever this practical joker is, we will show him he is wasting his talents—even though it means carrying a supernumerary for the rest of the voyage.”

“Well spoken!” said the captain. “But as far as that is concerned, I think I can keep Mr. Hunter occupied.”

“Then take him, and welcome!”

Whereupon, still elated but now somewhat uneasy, Larry accompanied Captain Petersen from the mess-room; started to, that is. But at a glance of sympathy from Diane, he dared call out:

“Say—hold on, folks! I haven’t had lunch yet!”

When young Larry Hunter reported to the captain of the *Nereid*, after this necessary meal, he found that the craft had returned to the surface.

Assigned a pair of powerful binoculars, he was ordered to stand watch in the conning-tower and

survey the horizon in every direction, in an effort to sight the vessel that had sent out that mysterious radio, but though he cast his good brown eyes diligently through those strong lenses, he saw not so much as a smoke tuft upon the broad, gray-blue surface of the hazy Atlantic.

Gradually, however, as the afternoon wore away, something else came in view. Masses of brownish seaweed, supported by small, berry-like bladders, began drifting by. Far apart at first, they began getting more and more dense, till at last, with a thrill, he realized that they were drawing into that strange area known as the Sargasso Sea.

Shortly after this realization dawned, he was ordered below, and as the tropic sun was sinking over that eery floating tombstone, which according to Professor Stevens marked a nation's grave, the *Nereid* submerged.

Down she slid, a hundred fathoms or more, on a long, even glide that took her deep under that veiling brown blanket.

In the navigating room now, Larry stood with the captain, the professor and Diane, studying an illuminated panel on which appeared a cross of five squares, like a box opened out.

The central square reproduced the scene below, while those to left and right depicted it from port and starboard, and those to front and rear revealed the forward and aft aspects of the panorama, thus affording a clear view in every direction.

This, then, was the television device Professor Stevens had referred to the previous afternoon, its mechanical eyes enabling them to search every square inch of those mysterious depths, as they cruised along.

It was the central square that occupied their attention chiefly, however, as they stood studying the panel. While the others represented merely an unbroken vista of greenish water, this one showed the sea floor as clearly as though they had been peering down into a shallow lagoon through a glass-bottomed boat, though it must have been a quarter of a mile below

their cruising level.

A wonderful and fearsome sight it was to Larry: like something seen in a nightmare—a fantastic desert waste of rocks and dunes, with here and there a yawning chasm whose ominous depths their ray failed to penetrate, and now and then a jutting plateau that would appear on the forward square and cause Captain Petersen to elevate their bow sharply.

But more thrilling than this was their first glimpse of a sunken ship—a Spanish galleon, beyond a doubt!

There she lay, grotesquely on her side, half rotted, half buried in the sand, but still discernible. And to Larry's wildly racing imagination, a flood of gold and jewels seemed to pour from her ruined coffers.

Turning to Diane, he saw that her eyes too were flashing with intense excitement.

"Say!" he exclaimed. "Why don't we stop and look her over? There may be a fortune down there!"

Professor Stevens promptly vetoed the suggestion, however.

“I must remind you, young man,” he said severely, “that this is not a treasure hunt.”

Whereupon Larry subsided; outwardly, at least. But when presently the central square revealed another and then another sunken ship, it was all he could do to contain himself.

Now, suddenly, Diane cried out:

“Oh, daddy, look! There’s a modern ship! A—a freighter, isn’t it?”

“A collier, I would say,” was her father’s calm reply. “Rather a large one, too. *Cyclops*, possibly. She disappeared some years ago, en route from the Barbados to Norfolk. Or possibly it is any one of a dozen other steel vessels that have vanished from these seas in recent times. The area of the Sargasso, my dear, is known as ‘The Port of Missing Ships.’”

“But couldn’t we drop down and make sure which ship it is?” she pleaded, voicing the very thought Larry had been struggling to suppress.

At the professor’s reply, however, he was glad he had kept quiet.

“We could, of course,” was his gentle though firm rebuke, “but if we stopped to solve the mystery of every sunken ship we shall probably see during this cruise, we would have time for nothing else. Nevertheless, my dear, you may take a short memorandum of the location and circumstances, in the present instance.”

Whereupon he dictated briefly, while Larry devoted his attention once more to the central square.

Suddenly, beyond a dark pit that seemed to reach down into the very bowels of the earth, rose an abrupt plateau—and on one of its nearer elevations, almost directly under then, loomed a monumental four-sided mound.

“Say—hold on!” called Larry. “Look at that, Professor! Isn’t that a building of some kind?”

Martin Stevens looked up, glanced skeptically toward the panel. But one glimpse at what that central square revealed, and his skepticism vanished.

“A building?” he cried in triumph. “A building indeed! It is a pyramid, young man!”

“Good Lord!”

“Oh, daddy! Really?”

“Beyond a doubt! And look—there are two other similar structures, only smaller!”

Struggling for calm, he turned to Captain Petersen, who had taken his eyes from the forward square and was peering down as well upon those singular mounds.

“Stop! Descend!” was his exultant command. “This is my proof! We have discovered Antillia!”

Swiftly the *Nereid* dropped to that submerged plateau.

In five minutes, her keel was resting evenly on the smooth sand beside the largest of the three pyramids.

Professor Stevens then announced that he would make a preliminary investigation of the site at once.

“For, otherwise, I for one would be quite unable to sleep tonight!” declared the graybeard, with a boyish chuckle.

He added that Diane would accompany him.

At this latter announcement, Larry’s heart sank. He had hoped against hope that he might be invited along with them.

But once again his champion came to his aid.

“We really ought to let Mr. Hunter come with us, daddy, don’t you think?” she urged, noting his disappointment. “After all, it was he who made the

discovery.”

“Very true,” said her father, “but I had not thought it necessary for anyone to accompany us. In the event anyone does, Captain Petersen should have that honor.”

But this honor the captain declined.

“If you don’t mind, sir, I’d prefer to stay with the ship,” he said, quietly. “I haven’t forgotten that radio warning.”

“But surely you don’t think anyone can molest us down here?” scoffed the professor.

“No, but I’d prefer to stay with the ship just the same, sir, if you don’t mind.”

“Very well”—with a touch of pique. “Then you may come along if you care to, Mr. Hunter.”

If he cared to!

“Thanks, Professor!” he said with a grateful look toward Diane. “I’d be keen to!”

So he accompanied them below, where they donned their pressure-suits—rubber affairs rather less cumbersome than ordinary deep-sea diving gear, reinforced with steel wire and provided with thick glass goggles and powerful searchlights, in addition to their vibratory communication apparatus and other devices that were explained to Larry.

When he had mastered their operation, which was rendered simple by reason of the fact that they were so nearly automatic, the trio stepped into a lock on the floor of the ship and Professor Stevens ordered them to couple their suits to air-valve connections on the wall, at the same time admitting water by opening another valve.

Swiftly the lock flooded, while their suits inflated.

“All right?” came his vibratory query.

“Right!” they both answered.

“Then stand by for the heavy pressure.”

Wider now he opened the water-valve, letting the ocean in, while at the same time their suits continued inflating through their air-valve connections.

To his surprise, Larry found himself no more inconvenienced by the pressure than he had been from the moment the submarine dove to its present depth. Indeed, most of the air that was coming into his suit was filling the reinforced space between its inner and outer layers, much as the *Nereid* held air under pressure between her two thick shells.

“All right now?” called out the professor’s vibrator.

“Right!” they called back again.

“Then uncouple your air-valve connections and make ready.”

They did so; and he likewise.

Then, advancing to a massive door like that of a vault,

he flung back its powerful clamps, dragged it open—and there beyond, its pressure equaled by that within the lock, loomed the black tide of the ocean bottom.

Awed by this solemn sight, tingling with a sense of unparalleled adventure, Larry stood there a moment, peering out over the threshold of that untrodden world.

Then he followed Diane and her father into its beckoning mystery....

Their searchlights cutting bright segments into the dark, they proceeded toward the vast mound that towered ahead, pushing through a weird realm of phosphorescent fish and other marine creatures.

As they neared it, any possible doubt that it was in fact a pyramid vanished. Corroded by the action of salt water and covered with the incrustations of centuries, it nevertheless presented unmistakable evidence of human construction, rising in steps of massive masonry to a summit shadowy in the murk above.

As Larry stood gazing upon that mighty proof that this submerged plateau had once stood forth proudly above the sea, he realized that he was a party to one of the most profound discoveries of the ages. What a furore this would make when he reported it back to his New York paper!

But New York seemed remote indeed, now. Would they ever get back? What if anything went wrong with their pressure-suits—or if they should become lost?

He glanced back uneasily, but there gleamed the reassuring lights of the *Nereid*, not a quarter of a mile away.

Diane and her father were now rounding a corner of the pyramid and he followed them, his momentary twinge of anxiety gone.

For some moments, Professor Stevens prowled about without comment, examining the huge basal blocks of the structure and glancing up its sloping sides.

“You see, I was right!” he declared at length. “This is

not only a man-made edifice but a true pyramid, embodying the same architectural principles as the Mayan and Egyptian forms. We see before us the visible evidence of a sunken empire—the missing link between Atlantis and America.”

No comments greeted this profound announcement and the professor continued:

“This structure appears to be similar in dimensions with that of the pyramid of Xochicalco, in Mexico, which in turn approximates that of the “Sacred Hill” of Atlantis, mentioned by Plato, and which was the prototype of both the Egyptian and Mayan forms. It was here the Antillians, as the Atlanteans had taught them to do, worshipped their grim gods and performed the human sacrifices they thought necessary to appease them. And it was here, too, if I am not mistaken, that—”

Suddenly his vibratory discourse was broken into by a sharp signal from the submarine:

“Pardon interruption! Hurry back! We are attacked!”

At this, the trio stood rigid.

“Captain Petersen! Captain Petersen!” Larry heard the professor call. “Speak up! Give details! What has happened?”

But an ominous silence greeted the query.

Another moment they stood there, thoroughly dismayed now. Then came the professor’s swift command:

“Follow me—quickly!”

He was already in motion, retracing his steps as fast as his bulky suit would permit. But as he rounded the corner of the pyramid, they saw him pause, stand staring. And as they drew up, they in turn paused; stood staring, too.

With sinking hearts, they saw that the *Nereid* was gone.

Stunned by this disaster, they stood facing one

another—three lone human beings, on the bottom of the Atlantic ocean, their sole means of salvation gone.

Professor Stevens was the first to speak.

“This is unbelievable!” he said. “I cannot credit it. We must have lost our senses.”

“Or our bearings!” added Diane, more hopefully.

“Suppose we look around the other side.”

As for Larry, a darker suspicion flashed through his mind. Captain Petersen! Had he seized his opportunity and led the crew to mutiny, in the hope of converting the expedition into a treasure hunt? Was that the reason he had been so willing to remain behind?

He kept his suspicion to himself, however, and accompanied Diane and her father on a complete circuit of the pyramid; but, as he feared, there was no sign of the *Nereid* anywhere. The craft had vanished as completely as though the ocean floor had opened and swallowed her up.

But no, not as completely as that! For presently the professor, who had proceeded to the site where they left the craft resting on the sand, called out excitedly:

“Here—come here! There are tracks! Captain Petersen was right! They were attacked!”

Hurrying to the scene, they saw before them the plain evidences of a struggle. The ocean bottom was scuffed and stamped, as though by many feet, and a clear trail showed where the craft had finally been dragged away.

Obviously there was but one thing to do and they did it. After a brief conference, they turned and followed the trail.

It led off over the plateau a quarter mile or more, in an eastward direction, terminating at length beside one of the smaller pyramids—and there lay the *Nereid*, apparently unharmed.

But her lights were out and there came no answer to their repeated calls, so they judged she must be

empty.

What had happened to Captain Petersen and his crew? What strange sub-sea enemy had overcome them? What was now their fate?

Unanswerable question! But one thing was certain. Larry had misjudged the captain in suspecting him of mutiny. He was sorry for this and resolved he would make amends by doing all in his power to rescue him and his men, if they were still living.

Meanwhile his own plight, and that of Diane and her father, was critical. What was to be done?

Suddenly, as all three stood there debating that question, Professor Stevens uttered an exclamation and strode toward the pyramid. Following him with their eyes, they saw him pass through an aperture where a huge block of stone had been displaced—and disappear within.

The next moment they had joined him, to find themselves in a small flooded chamber at whose far

end a narrow gallery sloped upward at a sharp angle.

The floor and walls were tiled, they noted, and showed none of the corrosion of the exterior surfaces. Indeed, so immaculate was the room that it might have been occupied but yesterday.

As they stood gazing around in wonder, scarcely daring to draw the natural inferences of this phenomena, there came a rasping sound, and, turning toward the entrance, they saw a massive section of masonry descend snugly into place.

They were trapped!

Standing there tense, speechless, they waited, wondering what would be the next move of this strange enemy who held them now so surely in his power.

Nor had they long to wait.

Almost immediately, there issued a gurgling sound from the inclined gallery, and turning their eyes in the

direction of this new phenomena, they saw that the water level was receding, as though under pressure from above.

“Singular!” muttered Professor Stevens. “A sort of primitive lock. It seems incredible that human creatures could exist down here, but such appears to be the case.”

Larry had no desire to dispute the assumption, nor had Diane. They stood there as people might in the imminence of the supernatural, awaiting they knew not what.

Swiftly the water receded.

Now it was scarcely up to their waists, now splashing about their ankles, and now the room was empty.

The next moment, there sounded a rush of feet—and down the gallery came a swarm of the strangest beings any of them had ever seen.

They were short, thin, almost emaciated, with pale,

pinched faces and pasty, half-naked bodies. But they shimmered with ornaments of gold and jade, like some strange princes from the realm of Neptune—or rather, like Aztec chieftains of the days of Cortes, thought Larry.

Blinking in the glare of the searchlights, they clamored around their captives, touching their pressure-suits half in awe and chattering among themselves.

Then one of them, larger and more regally clad than the rest, stepped up and gestured toward the balcony.

“They obviously desire us to accompany them above,” said the professor, “and quite as obviously we have little choice in the matter, so I suggest we do so.”

“Check!” said Larry.

“And double-check!” added Diane.

So they started up, preceded by a handful of their captors and followed by the main party.

The gallery seemed to be leading toward the center of the pyramid, but after a hundred feet or so it turned and continued up at a right angle, turning twice more before they arrived at length in another stone chamber, smaller than the one below.

Here their guides paused and waited for the main party.

There followed another conference, whereupon their leader stepped up again, indicating this time that they were to remove their suits.

At this, Professor Stevens balked.

“It is suicide!” he declared. “The air to which they are accustomed here is doubtless at many times our own atmospheric pressure.”

“But I don’t see that there’s anything to do about it,” said Larry, as their captors danced about them menacingly. “I for one will take a chance!”

And before they could stop him, he had pressed the

release-valve, emitting the air from his suit—slowly, at first, then more and more rapidly, as no ill effects seemed to result.

Finally, flinging off the now deflated suit, he stepped before them in his ordinary clothes, calling with a smile:

“Come on out, folks—the air’s fine!”

This statement was somewhat of an exaggeration, as the air smelt dank and bad. But at least it was breathable, as Diane and her father found when they emerged from their own suits.

They discovered, furthermore, now that their flashlights were no longer operating, that a faint illumination lit the room, issuing from a number of small crystal jars suspended from the walls: some sort of phosphorescence, evidently.

Once again the leader of the curious throng stepped up to them, beaming now and addressing Professor Stevens in some barbaric tongue, and, to their

amazement, he replied in words approximating its harsh syllables.

“Why, daddy!” gasped Diane. “How can you talk to him?”

“Simply enough,” was the reply. “They speak a language which seems to be about one-third Basque, mixed oddly with Greek. It merely proves another hypothesis of mine, namely, that the Atlantean influence reached eastward to the Pyrenees mountains and the Hellenic peninsula, as well as to Egypt.”

Whereupon he turned and continued his conversation, haltingly it is true and with many gestures, but understandably nevertheless.

“I have received considerable enlightenment as to the mystery of this strange sunken empire,” he reported, turning back to them at length. “It is a singular story this creature tells, of how his country sank slowly beneath the waves, during the course of centuries, and of how his ancestors adapted themselves by

degrees to the present conditions. I shall report it to you both, in detail, when time affords. But the main thing now is that a man similar to ourselves has conquered their country and set himself up as emperor. It is to him we are about to be taken."

"But it doesn't seem possible!" exclaimed Diane.
"Why, how could he have got down here?"

"In a craft similar to our own, according to this creature. Heaven knows what it is we are about to face! But whatever it is, we will face it bravely."

"Check and double-check!" said Larry, with a glance toward Diane that told her she would not find him wanting.

They were not destined to meet the test just then, however, for just at that moment a courier in breech-clout and sandals dashed up the gallery and burst into the room, bearing in his right hand a thin square of metal.

Bowing, he handed it to the leader of the pigmy

throng, with the awed word:

“Cabiri!”

At this, Professor Stevens gave a start.

“A message from their high priests!” he whispered.

Whatever it contained, the effect produced on the reader was profound. Facing his companions, he addressed them gravely. Then, turning from the room, he commanded the captives to follow.

The way led back down the inclined gallery to a point where another door now stood open, then on down until finally the passage leveled out into a long, straight tunnel.

This they traversed for fully a mile, entering at length a large, square chamber where for a moment they paused.

“I judge we are now at the base of the large pyramid,” the professor voiced in an undertone. “It would

naturally be the abode of the high priests.”

“But what do you suppose they want with us?” asked Diane.

“That I am not disposed to conjecture,” was her father’s reply.

But the note of anxiety in his voice was not lost on Diane, nor on Larry, who pressed her hand reassuringly.

Now their captors led them from the room through a small door opening on another inclined gallery, whose turns they followed until all were out of breath from the climb.

It ended abruptly on a short, level corridor with apertures to left and right.

Into the latter they were led, finding themselves in a grotesquely furnished room, lit dimly by phosphorescent lamps.

Swiftly the leader addressed Professor Stevens. Then all withdrew. The aperture was closed by a sliding block of stone.

For a moment they stood there silent, straining their eyes in the gloom to detect the details of their surroundings, which included several curious chairs and a number of mattings strewn on the tiled floor.

“What did he say?” asked Diane at length, in a tremulous voice.

“He said we will remain here for the night,” her father replied, “and will be taken before the high priests at dawn.”

“At dawn!” exclaimed Larry. “How the deuce do they know when it is dawn, down here?”

“By their calendars, which they have kept accurately,” was the answer. “But there are many other questions you must both want to ask, so I shall anticipate them by telling you now what I have been able to learn. Suppose we first sit down, however. I for one am

weary.”

Whereupon they drew up three of those curious chairs of some heavy wood carved with the hideous figures of this strange people’s ancient gods, and Professor Stevens began.

Their sunken empire, as he had surmised, had indeed been the great island of Antillia and a colony of Atlantis. A series of earthquakes and tidal waves such as engulfed their homeland ages before had sent it down, and the estimated archaeological date of the final submergence—namely, 200 B. C.—was approximately correct.

But long before this ultimate catastrophe, the bulk of the disheartened population had migrated to Central and South America, founding the Mayan and Incan dynasties. Many of the faithful had stayed on, however, among them most of the Cabiri or high priests, who either were loath to leave their temples or had been ordered by their gods to remain.

At any rate, they had remained, and as the great

island sank lower and lower, they had fortified themselves against the disaster in their pyramids, which by then alone remained above the surface.

These, too, had gradually disappeared beneath the angry waters, however, and with them had disappeared the steadfast priests and their faithful followers, sealing their living tombs into air-tight bell-jars that retained the atmosphere.

This they had supplemented at first by drawing it down from above, but as time went by they found other means of getting air; extracting it from the sea water under pressure, by utilizing their subterranean volcanoes, in whose seething cauldrons the gods had placed their salvation; and it was this process that now provided them with the atmosphere which had so amazed their captives.

But naturally, lack of sunshine had produced serious degeneration in their race, and that accounted for their diminutive forms and pale bodies. Still, they had been able to survive with a degree of happiness until some ten or a dozen years ago, when a strange enemy

had come down in a great metal fish, like that of these new strangers, and with a handful of men had conquered their country.

This marauder was after their gold and had looted their temples ruthlessly, carrying away its treasures, for which they hated him with a fury that only violation of their most sacred deities could arouse. Long ago they would have destroyed him, but for the fact that he possessed terrible weapons which were impossible to combat. But they were in smouldering rebellion and waited only the support of their gods, when they would fall on this oppressor and hurl him off.

That, though it left many things unexplained, was all the professor had been able to gather from his conversation with the leader of their captors. He ended, admitting regretfully that he was still in ignorance of what fate had befallen Captain Petersen and the crew of the *Nereid*.

“Perhaps this fellow in the other submarine has got them,” suggested Larry.

“But why weren’t we taken to him too?” asked Diane.
“What do you suppose they want with us, anyway, daddy?”

“That, my dear, as I told you before,” replied her father, “I am not disposed to conjecture. Time will reveal it. Meanwhile, we can only wait.”

As before, there was a note of anxiety in his voice not lost on either of them. And as for Larry, though he knew but little of those old religions, he knew enough to realize that their altars often ran with the blood of their captives, and he shuddered.

With these grim thoughts between them, the trio fell silent.

A silence that was interrupted presently by the arrival of a native bearing a tray heaped with strange food.

Bowing, he placed it before them and departed.

Upon examination, the meal proved to consist mainly of some curious kind of steamed fish, not unpalatable

but rather rank and tough. There were several varieties of fungus, too, more or less resembling mushrooms and doubtless grown in some sunless garden of the pyramid.

These articles, together with a pitcher of good water that had obviously been distilled from the sea, comprised their meal, and though it was far from appetizing, they ate it.

But none of the three slept that night, though Diane dozed off for a few minutes once or twice, for their apprehension of what the dawn might hold made it impossible, to say nothing of the closeness of the air in that windowless subterranean room.

Slowly, wearily, the hours dragged by.

At length the native who had brought their food came again. This time he spoke.

“He says we are now to be taken before the high priests,” Professor Stevens translated for them.

Almost with relief, though their faces were grave, they stepped out into the corridor, where an escort waited.

Five minutes later, after proceeding along an inclined gallery that wound ever upward, they were ushered into a vast vaulted chamber lit with a thousand phosphorescent lamps and gleaming with idols of gold and silver, jewels flashing from their eyes.

High in the dome hung a great golden disc, representing the sun. At the far end, above a marble altar, coiled a dragon with tusks of ivory and scales of jade, its eyes two lustrous pearls.

And all about the room thronged priests in fantastic head-dress and long white robes, woven through elaborately with threads of yellow and green.

At the appearance of the captives, a murmur like a chant rose in the still air. Someone touched a brand to the altar and there was a flash of flame followed by a thin column of smoke that spiraled slowly upward.

Now one of the priests stepped out—the supreme one among them, to judge from the magnificence of his robe—and addressed the trio, speaking slowly, rhythmically.

As his strange, sonorous discourse continued, Professor Stevens grew visibly perturbed. His beard twitched and he shifted uneasily on his feet.

Finally the discourse ceased and the professor replied to it, briefly. Then he turned grave eyes on Larry and Diane.

“What is it?” asked the latter, nervously. “What did the priest say, daddy?”

Her father considered, before replying.

“Naturally, I did not gather everything,” was his slow reply, “but I gathered sufficient to understand what is afoot. First, however, let me explain that the dragon you see over there represents their deity Tlaloc, god

of the sea. In more happy circumstances, it would be interesting to note that the name is identified with the Mayan god of the same element.”

He paused, as though loath to go on, then continued:

“At any rate, the Antillians have worshipped Tlaloc principally, since their sun god failed them. They believe he dragged down their empire in his mighty coils, through anger with them, and will raise it up again if appeased. Therefore they propose today to—”

“Daddy!” cried Diane, shrinking back in horror, while a chill went up Larry’s spine. “You mean—mean that —”

“I mean, my poor child, that we are about to be sacrificed to the dragon god of the Antillians.”

The words were no more than uttered, when with a weird chant the Cabiri closed in on their victims and led them with solemn ceremonial toward the altar.

In vain did Professor Stevens protest. Their decision

had been made and was irrevocable. Tlaloc must be appeased. Lo, even now he roared for the offering!

They pointed to the dragon, from whose nostrils suddenly issued hissing spurts of flame.

Larry fumed in disgust at the cheap hocus-pocus of it—but the next moment a more violent emotion swept over him as he saw Diane seized and borne swiftly to that loathsome shrine.

But even as he lunged forward, the professor reached his daughter's side. Throwing himself in front of her, he begged them to spare her, to sacrifice him instead.

The answer of the priests was a blow that knocked the graybeard senseless, and lifting Diane up, half-swooning, they flung her upon the altar.

"Mr. Hunter! Larry!" came her despairing cry.

She struggled up and for a moment her blue eyes opened, met his beseechingly.

That was enough—that and that despairing cry,
“Larry!”

With the strength of frenzy, he flung off his captors,
rushed to her aid, his hard fists flailing.

The pigmies went down in his path like grain before
the scythe. Reaching the altar, he seized the priest
whose knife was already upraised, and, lifting him
bodily, flung him full into the ugly snout of that
snorting dragon.

Then, as a wail of dismay rose from the Cabiri, at this
supreme sacrilege, he seized the now unconscious
Diane and retreated with her toward the door.

But there spears barred his escape; and now,
recovered from the first shock of this fearful affront to
their god, the priests started toward him.

Standing at bay, with that limp, tender burden in his
arms, Larry awaited the end.

As the maddened horde drew near, she stirred, lifted

her pale face and smiled, her eyes still shut.

“Oh, Larry!”

“Diane!”

“You saved me. I won’t forget.”

Then, the smile still lingering, she slipped once more into merciful oblivion, and as Larry held her close to his heart, a new warmth kindled there.

But bitterness burned in his heart, too. He had saved her—won her love, perhaps—only to lose her. It wasn’t fair! Was there no way out?

The priests were close now, their pasty faces leering with fierce anticipation of their revenge, when suddenly, from down the gallery outside that guarded door, came the sharp crash of an explosion, followed by shouts and the rush of feet.

At the sound, the priests trembled, fled backward into the room and fell moaning before their idols, while

the quaking guards strove frantically to close the door.

But before they could do so, in burst a half dozen brawny sailors in foreign uniform, bearing in their hands little black bulbs that looked suspiciously like grenades. Shouting in a tongue Larry could not distinguish above the uproar, they advanced upon the retreating guards and priests.

Then, when all were herded in the far corner of the room, the sailors backed toward the door. Motioning for Larry and Diane to clear out, they raised those sinister little missiles, prepared to fling them.

“Wait!” cried Larry, thinking of Professor Stevens.

And releasing Diane, who had revived, he rushed forward, seized the prostrate savant from amid the unresisting Cabiri, and bore him to safety.

“Daddy!” sobbed Diane, swaying to meet them.

“Back!” shouted one of the sailors, shoving them

through the door.

The last glimpse Larry had of that fateful room was the horde of priests and guards huddled before their altar, voices lifted in supplication to that hideous dragon god.

Then issued a series of blinding flashes followed by deafening explosions, mingled with shrieks of anguish.

Sickened, he stood there, as the reverberations died away.

Presently, when it was plain no further menace would come from that blasted temple, their rescuers led the trio back down those winding galleries, and through that long, straight tunnel to the smaller pyramid.

Professor Stevens had recovered consciousness by now and was able to walk, with Larry's aid, though a matted clot of blood above his left ear showed the force of the blow he had received.

The way, after reaching the smaller pyramid, led up those other galleries they had mounted the night before.

This time, undoubtedly, they were to be taken before that mysterious usurping emperor. And what would be the result of that audience? Would it but plunge them from the frying pan into the fire, wondered Larry, or would it mean their salvation?

Anyway, he concluded, no fate could be worse than the hideous one they had just escaped. But if only Diane could be spared further anguish!

He glanced at her fondly, as they walked along, and she returned him a warm smile.

Now the way led into a short, level passage ending in a door guarded by two sailors with rifles. They presented arms, as their comrades came up, and flung open the door.

As he stepped inside, Larry blinked in amazement, for he was greeted by electric lights in ornate clusters,

richly carpeted floors, walls hung with modern paintings—and there at the far end, beside a massive desk, stood an imposing personage in foreign naval uniform of high rank, strangely familiar, strangely reminiscent of war days.

Even before the man spoke, in his guttural English, the suspicion those sailors had aroused crystallized itself.

A German! A U-boat commander!

“Greetings, gentlemen—and the little lady,” boomed their host, with heavy affability. “I see that my men were in time. These swine of Antillians are a tricky lot. I must apologize for them—my subjects.”

The last word was pronounced with scathing contempt.

“We return greetings!” said Professor Stevens. “To whom, might I ask, do we owe our lives, and the honor of this interview?”

Larry smiled. The old graybeard was up to his form, all right!

“You are addressing Herr Rolf von Ullrich,” the flattered German replied, adding genially:

“commander of one of His Imperial Majesty’s super-submarines during the late war and at present Emperor of Antillia.”

To which the professor replied with dignity that he was greatly honored to make the acquaintance of so exalted a personage, and proceeded in turn to introduce himself and party. But Von Ullrich checked him with a smile.

“The distinguished Professor Stevens and his charming daughter need no introduction, as they are already familiar to me through the American press and radio,” he said. “While as for Mr. Hunter, your Captain Petersen has already made me acquainted with his name.”

At the mention of the commander of the *Nereid*, all three of them gave a start.

“Then—then my captain and crew are safe?” asked the professor, eagerly.

“Quite,” Von Ullrich assured him. “You will be taken to them presently. But first there are one or two little things you would like explained—yes? Then I shall put to you a proposal, which if acceptable will guarantee your safe departure from my adopted country.”

Whereupon the German traced briefly the events leading up to the present.

During the last months of the war, he had been placed in command of a special U-boat known as the “mystery ship”—designed to resist depth-charges and embodying many other innovations, most of them growing out of his own experience with earlier submarines.

One day, while cruising off the West Indies, in wait for some luckless sugar boat, he had been surprised by a destroyer and forced to submerge so suddenly that his diving gear had jammed and they had gone to the bottom. But the craft had managed to withstand the

pressure and they had been able to repair the damage, limping home with a bad leak but otherwise none the worse for the experience.

The leak repaired and the hull further strengthened, he had set out again. But when in mid-Atlantic the Armistice had come, and rather than return to a defeated country, subject possibly to Allied revenge, he had persuaded his crew to remain out and let their craft be reported missing.

What followed then, though Von Ullrich masked it in polite words, was a story of piracy, until they found by degrees that there was more gold on the bottom of the ocean than the top; and from this to the discovery of the sunken empire where he now held reign was but a step.

They had thought at first they were looting only empty temples—but, finding people there, had easily conquered them, though ruling them, he admitted, was another matter. As, for instance, yesterday, when the priests had interfered with his orders and carried his three chief captives off to sacrifice.

“Where now, but for me, you would be food for their gods!” he ended. “And if you do not find my hospitality altogether to your liking, friends, remember that you came uninvited. In fact, if you will recall, you came despite my explicit warning!”

But since they were here, he told them, they might be willing to repay his good turn with another.

Whereupon Von Ullrich launched into his proposal, which was that Professor Stevens place the *Nereid* at his disposal for visiting the depths at the foot of the plateau, where lay the capital of the empire, he said—a magnificent metropolis known as the City of the Sun and modeled after the great Atlantean capital, the City of the Golden Gates, and the depository of a treasure, the greedy German believed, that was the ransom of the world.

The professor frowned, and for a moment Larry thought he was going to remind their host that this was not a treasure hunt.

“Why,” he asked instead, “do you not use your own

submarine for the purpose?”

“Because for one thing, she will not stand the pressure, nor will our suits,” was the reply. “And for another, she is already laden with treasure, ready for an—er—forced abdication!” with a sardonic laugh.

“Then have you not enough gold already?”

“For myself, yes. But there are my men, you see—and men who have glimpsed the treasures of the earth are not easily satisfied, Professor. But have no fear. You shall accompany us, and, by your aid, shall pay your own ransom.”

Von Ullrich made no mention of the alternative, in case the aid was refused, but the ominous light Larry caught in his cold gray eyes spoke as clearly as words.

So, since there was nothing else to do, Professor Stevens agreed.

Whereupon the audience terminated and they were

led from the presence of this arrogant German to another apartment, where they were to meet Captain Petersen and the crew of the *Nereid*.

As they proceeded toward it, under guard, Larry wondered why Von Ullrich had even troubled to make the request, when he held it in his power to take the craft anyway.

But after the first joyful moment of reunion, it was a mystery no longer, for Captain Petersen reported that immediately upon their capture, the commander of the U-boat had tried to force him to reveal the operation of the *Nereid*, but that he had steadfastly refused, even though threatened with torture.

And to think, it came to Larry with a new twinge of shame, that he had suspected this gallant man of mutiny!

That very morning, while Professor Stevens and his party were still exchanging experiences with Captain Petersen and the members of the crew, Von Ullrich sent for them and they gathered with his own men in

the small lock-chamber at the base of the pyramid.

There they were provided with temporary suits by their host, since their own—which they brought along—could be inflated only from the *Nereid*.

Beside her, they noted as they emerged in relays, the U-boat was now moored.

Entering their own craft, they got under way at once and headed swiftly westward toward the brink of the plateau. Most of Von Ullrich's crew were with them, though a few had been left behind to guard against any treachery, on the part of the now sullen and aroused populace.

Slipping out over the edge of that precipitous tableland, they tilted her rudders and dove to the abyss below.

Presently the central square of the illuminated panel in the navigating room showed three great concentric circles, enclosed by a quadrangle that must have been miles on a side—and within this vast sunken fortress

lay a city of innumerable pyramids and temples and palaces.

The German's eyes flashed greedily as he peered upon this vision.

"There you are!" he exclaimed, quivering with excitement. "Those circles, that square: what would you judge they were, Professor?"

"I would judge that originally they were the canals bearing the municipal water supply," Martin Stevens told him quietly, suppressing his own excitement, "for such was said to be the construction of the City of the Golden Gates; but now I judge they are walls raised on those original foundations by the frantic populace, when the submergence first began, in a vain effort to hold back the tides that engulfed them."

"And do you think they are of gold?"

"Frankly, no; though I have no doubt you will find plenty of that element down there."

Nor was the prediction wrong, for modern eyes had never seen such a treasure house as they beheld when presently the *Nereid* came to rest outside that ancient four-walled city and they forced their way inside.

Though the walls were not of gold, the inner gates were, and the temples were fairly bursting with the precious metal, as well as rare jewels, the eyes of a thousand idols gleaming with rubies and emeralds.

But where was the populace, amid all this prodigious wealth? Was there no life down here?

Von Ullrich declared through the vibrator of his pressure-suit that he had heard there was. And as though in substantiation, many of the temples showed the same bell-jar construction as the pyramids above, though even stouter, revealing evidences of having been occupied very recently; but all were flooded and empty. The city was as a city of the dead.

This ominous sign did not deter the “emperor,” however. Ruthlessly he and his men looted those

flooded temples, forcing Professor Stevens and his party to lend aid in the orgy of pillage.

And all the time, Larry had an uneasy feeling of gathering furtive hosts about them, waiting—waiting for what?

He confided his fears to no one, though he noted with relief that Von Ullrich seemed to sense these unseen presences too, for he proceeded with caution and always kept a strong guard outside.

By early afternoon, the *Nereid* was one great coffer-chest.

But still the rapacious U-boat commander was unsatisfied, though Professor Stevens began to have doubts if his craft could lift that massive weight of plunder to the top of the plateau.

“One more load and we go,” he soothed. “A few more pretties for the little lady!”

Larry writhed, and should have suspected then and

there—but as it was, the blow fell unexpected, stunning.

Filing from the lock, they failed to notice that Von Ullrich and his crew hung back, until there came a sudden, guttural command, whereupon Diane was seized and the massive door flung shut in their faces.

Appalled by this overwhelming disaster, the party stood for a moment motionless, speechless. Then, as one, Larry and the professor rushed forward and beat upon that barred hatch, calling upon Von Ullrich to open it.

From within the submarine, through their vibrators, they heard him laugh.

“Auf Wiedersehen!” he toasted them. “I now have all the treasure I want! The rest I leave to you! Help yourselves!”

Even as he spoke, the *Nereid’s* auxiliary propellers started churning the water. Slowly, sluggishly, like some great gorged fish, the sturdy craft moved off,

lifted her snout, headed upward.

Professor Stevens bowed his head, and Larry could well picture the grief that distorted the graybeard's face, inside that owl-eyed helmet.

"Cheer up!" he said, though his own face was twisted with anguish. "Perhaps—"

Then he paused—for how could he say that perhaps the situation wasn't as bad as it seemed, when it was obviously hopeless?

"My poor Diane!" moaned the professor. "Poor child. Poor child!"

As for Captain Petersen and the crew, they said nothing. Perhaps they were thinking of Diane, perhaps of themselves. At least, they knew it was over.

Or so they thought. But to Larry, suddenly, occurred a gleam of hope. That strange sense of unseen presences! It was bizarre, of course, but doesn't a

drowning person catch at straws? And Lord knows they were drowning, if ever anyone was!

He turned and confided to Professor Stevens his idea, which was to retrace their steps within the city gates, seek out the populace and throw themselves on their mercy.

The stricken savant, too, grasped at the straw.

“It seems fantastic, but after all it is a chance,” he admitted.

So they pushed back into that great submerged city, with Captain Petersen and his skeptical crew. They entered one of the largest of the temples, wandered forlornly through its flooded halls and corridors, seeking some sign of these alleged beings Larry had sensed.

Nor was their search unrewarded, for suddenly the captain himself, most skeptical of all, cried out:

“Listen! Did you hear that?”

There was no need to ask the question, for all had heard. It was a rasping sound, as of some great door swinging shut, followed almost immediately by a rushing gurgle—and as they stood there tense, the water level began rapidly receding.

Even while it was still splashing about their ankles, a secret block of masonry slid back and a horde of Antillians burst in upon them.

What happened then, happened with a rush that left them dazed.

Unable to talk directly with the pigmies, by reason of their pressure-suits, which they dared not remove, they started gesturing with them, trying to explain their predicament and make known that they bore them no ill-will, but the creatures waved for them to cease and led them swiftly through the now waterless temple.

“Well, I guess it’s all up!” said Larry, adding with dismal humor: “They’re probably going to finish that meal they started feeding their dragon last night!”

No one laughed, nor made any comment, and he relapsed into silence, realizing that they probably held him responsible for this latest disaster.

Leaving the temple, their captors led them into a passage that was level for a time, then inclined sharply. It was laborious going but they struggled on.

“I believe they know we are not their enemies!” declared Professor Stevens, at length, to everyone’s cheer. “They seem to be leading us back to the plateau by some underground passage.”

“Let’s hope so!” said Larry. “Perhaps I had the right hunch after all.”

“But my poor Diane!” came the professor’s sorrowing after-thought. “That fiend Von Ullrich could never get the *Nereid* up safely.”

“I think perhaps he could, with Miss Stevens to help him,” put in Captain Petersen, his usual optimism returning. “She is thoroughly familiar with the craft’s operation.”

“That is so,” her father admitted, his tone brighter.
“But—”

“Of course it’s so!” exclaimed Larry, breaking off any less hopeful reflections. “So cheerio, folks, as the English say. We’ll make it yet!”

But in his heart, he was tormented with doubt for Diane’s safety....

The trail was growing eery, now, and precipitous. To their right rose a sheer cliff. To their left, the path fell off abruptly to a gigantic caldron where red flames leaped and waned.

“Looks like something out of Dante’s ‘Inferno’!” muttered Larry, with a shudder.

“The volcano where they distill their atmosphere, evidently,” commented Professor Stevens. “It would have been interesting, in other circumstances, to observe the process.”

“Not to me, it wouldn’t!”

Larry was glad when they had passed that seething hell-pot and were once more proceeding through a long, dark gallery.

But everywhere, though their guides were but a handful, was a sense of those unseen presences, of gathering, furtive hosts about them, waiting—waiting for what?

What was this strange sense of tension, of foreboding, that hung in the air? Was the professor wrong? Were they being led to their doom, after all?

He was soon to know, for now the gallery they had been traversing levelled out into a series of short passages, each barred by a heavy stone door, and finally they were led into a small, square room, barely large enough to admit them all.

There, with gestures toward the far end, their guides left them.

The door closed, and almost immediately another on the opposite side opened, slowly at first, then wider

and wider, admitting a rush of water that promptly filled the room.

Stepping wonderingly out, they found themselves on the upper level, beside the second of the two smaller pyramids.

“Whew!” gasped Larry, as they stood looking around, still a little dazed. “These people are sure quick-change artists! First they try to feed you to their gods, then they save you from almost as bad a fate. Dizzy, I call it!”

“Quite understandable, I should say,” declared the professor. “Unable to cope with Von Ullrich themselves, they think perhaps we may be able to.”

“Well, let’s hope they’re right!” grimly. “If once I get my hands on him—”

He broke off suddenly, as Captain Petersen called out:

“The *Nereid*! There she is!”

Following with their eyes the bright segment cut into the murky depths by his flashlight, they saw the familiar outlines of their craft; and close beside her lay the U-boat.

A feverish activity seemed to be going on between the two submarines.

“They’re changing cargo!” cried Larry. “Quick! We’ve got them now!”

But the progress they were able to make, hampered by their heavy suits, was maddeningly slow. Their searchlights, moreover, betrayed their approach. Before they could reach the scene, most of the sailors had abandoned their task and piled into the U-boat.

Arms swinging wildly, Von Ullrich stood beside it, trying to rally them. Refusing to risk combat, however, since they were unable to use their deadly hand-grenades under water, they continued clambering up the sides of their submersible and shoving down through its conning-tower hatch.

Now a figure in a familiar pressure-suit broke away and started toward the advancing party.

It was Diane!

Even as he recognized her, Larry saw Von Ullrich lunge forward, seize his captive and mount to the conning-tower with her—but before the German could thrust her into the hatch, he had reached the U-boat's side and clambered to her rescue.

Dropping Diane, Von Ullrich wheeled to face his assailant. They grappled, fell to the deck, rolled over and over.

But suddenly, as they were struggling, there came a sound that caused the German to burst free and leap to his feet.

It was the sound of engines under them!

Ignoring Larry now, Von Ullrich staggered to the conning-tower hatch. It was battened fast. Frantically he beat on it.

This much Larry saw, as he knelt there getting his breath. Then he rose, took Diane by the arm and led her down. And he was none too soon, for with a lunge the U-boat got under way.

But she seemed unable to lift her loot-laden mass from the ocean floor, and headed off crazily across the plateau, dragging her keel in the sand.

With fascinated horror, they watched the craft's erratic course, as it swung loggily westward and headed toward that yawning abyss from which they had all so lately risen.

The last sight they had of the U-boat was as it reached the brink, its despairing commander still standing in the conning-tower, hammering vainly on that fast-bound hatch; then they turned away faint, as the doomed craft plunged down, stern up, into those crushing depths.

Professor Stevens now joined them.

"A lesson in avarice," he said gravely, when he had

greeted his daughter with heartfelt relief. "And a typical fate of fortune hunters! Let that be a lesson to you, young man."

"Amen!" said Larry.

"But what happened, my dear?" asked the professor of Diane, a moment later. "Why were they in such a hurry to be off?"

"Because the sensible Antillians seized their opportunity and overcame their guards, while we were below," was her reply. "When we got back, we found the pyramids flooded, so there was nothing else for them to do but go."

So that was the explanation of those gathering, furtive hosts in the lower level, thought Larry. Now he knew what they had been waiting for! They had been waiting for that usurping vandal to depart.

And how they must be gloating now, down there!

"But why were they so eager to abandon the *Nereid*?"

asked the savant, still puzzled. "It it a better boat than theirs, even if I do say so myself."

"Because I put it out of commission, directly we got back up here," replied Diane. "But not permanently!" she added, with what Larry knew was a smile, though he couldn't see her face, of course, through the helmet of her pressure-suit.

"Little thoroughbred!" he exclaimed, half to himself.

"What did you say, Mr. Hunter?—Larry, I mean," she inquired.

"N—nothing," he replied uneasily.

"Fibber!" said Diane. "I heard you the first time!"

"Just wait till I get out of this darned suit!" said Larry.

"I guess I can wait that long!" she told him.

And if Professor Stevens heard any of this, it went in one ear and out the other, for he was thinking what a

report he would have to make to his confrères when they got home—particularly with half a boatload of assorted idols for proof.

#66 The Gate To Xoran, By Hal K. Wells:

A strange man of metal comes to earth on a dreadful mission.

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

just as Arlok came through the door



- - -

He sat in a small half-darkened booth well over in the corner—the man with the strangely glowing blue-green eyes.

The booth was one of a score that circled the walls of the “Maori Hut,” a popular night club in the San Fernando Valley some five miles over the hills from Hollywood.

It was nearly midnight. Half a dozen couples danced

lazily in the central dancing space. Other couples remained tête-à-tête in the secluded booths.

In the entire room only two men were dining alone. One was the slender gray-haired little man with the weirdly glowing eyes. The other was Blair Gordon, a highly successful young attorney of Los Angeles. Both men had the unmistakable air of waiting for someone.

Blair Gordon's college days were not so far distant that he had yet lost any of the splendid physique that had made him an All-American tackle. In any physical combat with the slight gray-haired stranger, Gordon knew that he should be able to break the other in two with one hand.

Yet, as he studied the stranger from behind the potted palms that screened his own booth. Gordon was amazed to find himself slowly being overcome by an emotion of dread so intense that it verged upon sheer fear. There was something indescribably alien and utterly sinister in that dimly seen figure in the corner booth.

The faint eery light that glowed in the stranger's deep-set eyes was not the lambent flame seen in the chatoyant orbs of some night-prowling jungle beast. Rather was it the blue-green glow of phosphorescent witch-light that flickers and dances in the night mists above steaming tropical swamps.

The stranger's face was as classically perfect in its rugged outline as that of a Roman war-god, yet those perfect features seemed utterly lifeless. In the twenty minutes that he had been intently watching the stranger, Gordon would have sworn that the other's face had not moved by so much as the twitch of an eye-lash.

Then a new couple entered the Maori Hut, and Gordon promptly forgot all thought of the puzzlingly alien figure in the corner. The new arrivals were a vibrantly beautiful blond girl and a plump, sallow-faced man in the early forties. The girl was Leah Keith, Hollywood's latest screen sensation. The man was Dave Redding, her director.

A waiter seated Leah and her escort in a booth

directly across the room from that of Gordon. It was a maneuver for which Gordon had tipped lavishly when he first came to the Hut.

A week ago Leah Keith's engagement to Blair Gordon had been abruptly ended by a trivial little quarrel that two volatile temperaments had fanned into flames which apparently made reconciliation impossible. A miserably lonely week had finally ended in Gordon's present trip to the Maori Hut. He knew that Leah often came there, and he had an overwhelming longing to at least see her again, even though his pride forced him to remain unseen.

Now, as he stared glumly at Leah through the palms that effectively screened his own booth, Gordon heartily regretted that he had ever come. The sight of Leah's clear fresh beauty merely made him realize what a fool he had been to let that ridiculous little quarrel come between them.

Then, with a sudden tingling thrill, Gordon realized that he was not the only one in the room who was interested in Leah and her escort.

Over in the half-darkened corner booth the eery stranger was staring at the girl with an intentness that made his weird eyes glow like miniature pools of shimmering blue-green fire. Again Gordon felt that vague impression of dread, as though he were in the presence of something utterly alien to all human experience.

Gordon turned his gaze back to Leah, then caught his breath sharply in sudden amaze. The necklace about Leah's throat was beginning to glow with the same uncanny blue-green light that shone in the stranger's eyes! Faint, yet unmistakable, the shimmering radiance pulsed from the necklace in an aura of nameless evil.

And with the coming of that aura of weird light at her throat, a strange trance was swiftly sweeping over Leah. She sat there now as rigidly motionless as some exquisite statue of ivory and jet.

Gordon stared at her in stark bewilderment. He knew the history of Leah's necklace. It was merely an oddity, and nothing more—a freak piece of costume

jewelry made from fragments of an Arizona meteorite. Leah had worn the necklace a dozen times before, without any trace of the weird phenomena that were now occurring.

Dancers again thronged the floor to the blaring jazz of the negro orchestra while Gordon was still trying to force his whirling brain to a decision. He was certain that Leah was in deadly peril of some kind, yet the nature of that peril was too bizarre for his mind to imagine.

Then the stranger with the glowing eyes took matters into his own hands. He left his booth and began threading his way through the dancers toward Leah. As he watched the progress of that slight gray-haired figure Gordon refused to believe the evidence of his own eyes. The thing was too utterly absurd—yet Gordon was positive that the strong oak floor of the dancing space was visibly swaying and creaking beneath the stranger's mincing tread!

The stranger paused at Leah's booth only long enough to utter a brief low-voiced command. Then

Leah, still in the grip of that strange trance, rose obediently from her seat to accompany him.

Dave Redding rose angrily to intercept her. The stranger seemed to barely brush the irate director with his finger tips, yet Redding reeled back as though struck by a pile-driver. Leah and the stranger started for the door. Redding scrambled to his feet again and hurried after them.

It was then that Gordon finally shook off the stupor of utter bewilderment that had held him. Springing from his booth, he rushed after the trio.

The dancers in his way delayed Gordon momentarily. Leah and the stranger were already gone when he reached the door. The narrow little entrance hallway to the Hut was deserted save for a figure sprawled there on the floor near the outer door.

It was the body of Dave Redding. Gordon shuddered as he glanced briefly down at the huddled figure. A single mighty blow from some unknown weapon had crumpled the director's entire face in, like the

shattered shell of a broken egg.

Gordon charged on through the outer door just as a heavy sedan came careening out of the parking lot. He had a flashing glimpse of Leah and the stranger in the front seat of the big car.

Gordon raced for his own machine, a powerful low-slung roadster. A single vicious jab at the starting button, and the big motor leaped into roaring life. Gordon shot out from the parking lot onto the main boulevard. A hundred yards away the sedan was fleeing toward Hollywood.

Gordon tramped hard on the accelerator. His engine snarled with the unleashed fury of a hundred horsepower. The gap between the two cars swiftly lessened.

Then the stranger seemed to become aware for the first time that he was being followed. The next second the big sedan accelerated with the hurtling speed of a flying bullet. Gordon sent his own foot nearly to the floor. The roadster jumped to eighty miles an hour, yet

the sedan continued to leave it remorselessly behind.

The two cars started up the northern slope of Cahuenga Pass with the sedan nearly two hundred yards ahead, and gaining all the time. Gordon wondered briefly if they were to flash down the other side of the Pass and on into Hollywood at their present mad speed.

Then at the summit of the Pass the sedan swerved abruptly to the right and fled west along the Mulholland Highway. Gordon's tires screamed as he swerved the roadster in hot pursuit.

The dark winding mountain highway was nearly deserted at that hour of the night. Save for an occasional automobile that swerved frantically to the side of the road to dodge the roaring onslaught of the racing cars, Gordon and the stranger had the road to themselves.

The stranger seemed no longer to be trying to leave his pursuer hopelessly behind. He allowed Gordon to come within a hundred yards of him. But that was as

near as Gordon could get, in spite of the roadster's best efforts.

Half a dozen times Gordon trod savagely upon his accelerator in a desperate attempt to close the gap, but each time the sedan fled with the swift grace of a scudding phantom. Finally Gordon had to content himself with merely keeping his distance behind the glowing red tail-light of the car ahead.

They passed Laurel Canyon, and still the big sedan bored on to the west. Then finally, half a dozen miles beyond Laurel Canyon, the stranger abruptly left the main highway and started up a narrow private road to the crest of one of the lonely hills. Gordon slowly gained in the next two miles. When the road ended in a winding gravelled driveway into the grounds of what was apparently a private estate, the roadster was scarcely a dozen yards behind.

The stranger's features as he stood there stiffly erect in the vivid glare of the roadster's headlights were still as devoid of all expression as ever. The only things that really seemed alive in that masque of a

face were the two eyes, glowing eery blue-green fire like twin entities of alien evil.

Gordon wasted no time in verbal sparring. He motioned briefly to Leah Keith's rigid form in the front seat of the sedan.

"Miss Keith is returning to Hollywood with me," he said curtly. "Will you let her go peaceably, or shall I —?" He left the question unfinished, but its threat was obvious.

"Or shall you do what?" asked the stranger quietly. There was an oddly metallic ring in his low even tones. His words were so precisely clipped that they suggested some origin more mechanical than human.

"Or shall I take Miss Keith with me by force?" Gordon flared angrily.

"You can try to take the lady by force—if you wish." There was an unmistakable jeering note in the metallic tones.

The taunt was the last thing needed to unleash Gordon's volatile temper. He stepped forward and swung a hard left hook for that expressionless masque of a face. But the blow never landed. The stranger dodged with uncanny swiftness. His answering gesture seemed merely the gentlest possible push with an outstretched hand, yet Gordon was sent reeling backward a full dozen steps by the terrific force of that apparently gentle blow.

Recovering himself, Gordon grimly returned to the attack. The stranger again flung out one hand in the contemptuous gesture with which one would brush away a troublesome fly, but this time Gordon was more cautious. He neatly dodged the stranger's blow, then swung a vicious right squarely for his adversary's unprotected jaw.

The blow smashed solidly home with all of Gordon's weight behind it. The stranger's jaw buckled and gave beneath that shattering impact. Then abruptly his entire face crumpled into distorted ruin. Gordon staggered back a step in sheer horror at the gruesome result of his blow.

The stranger flung a hand up to his shattered features. When his hand came away again, his whole face came away with it!

Gordon had one horror-stricken glimpse of a featureless blob of rubbery bluish-gray flesh in which fiendish eyes of blue-green fire blazed in malignant fury.

Then the stranger fumbled at his collar, ripping the linen swiftly away. Something lashed out from beneath his throat—a loathsome snake-like object, slender and forked at the end. For one ghastly moment, as the writhing tentacle swung into line with him, Gordon saw its forked ends glow strange fire—one a vivid blue, the other a sparkling green.

Then the world was abruptly blotted out for Blair Gordon.

Consciousness returned to Gordon as swiftly and painlessly as it had left him. For a moment he blinked stupidly in a dazed effort to comprehend the incredible scene before him.

He was seated in a chair over near the wall of a large room that was flooded with livid red light from a single globe overhead. Beside him sat Leah Keith, also staring with dazed eyes in an effort to comprehend her surroundings. Directly in front of them stood a figure of stark nightmare horror.

The weirdly glowing eyes identified the figure as that of the stranger at the Maori Hut, but there every point of resemblance ceased. Only the cleverest of facial masques and body padding could ever have enabled this monstrosity to pass unnoticed in a world of normal human beings.

Now that his disguise was completely stripped away, his slight frame was revealed as a grotesque parody of that of a human being, with arms and legs like pipe-stems, a bald oval head that merged with neckless rigidity directly into a heavy-shouldered body that tapered into an almost wasp-like slenderness at the waist. He was naked save for a loin cloth of some metallic fabric. His bluish-gray skin had a dull oily sheen strangely suggestive of fine grained flexible metal.

The creature's face was hideously unlike anything human. Beneath the glowing eyes was a small circular mouth orifice with a cluster of gill-like appendages on either side of it. Patches of lighter-colored skin on either side of the head seemed to serve as ears. From a point just under the head, where the throat of a human being would have been, dangled the foot-and-a-half long tentacle whose forked tip had sent Gordon into oblivion.

Behind the creature Gordon was dimly aware of a maze of complicated and utterly unfamiliar apparatus ranged along the opposite wall, giving the room the appearance of being a laboratory of some kind.

Gordon's obvious bewilderment seemed to amuse the bluish-gray monstrosity. "May I introduce myself?" he asked with a mocking note in his metallic voice. "I am Arlok of Xoran. I am an explorer of Space, and more particularly an Opener of Gates. My home is upon Xoran, which is one of the eleven major planets that circle about the giant blue-white sun that your astronomers call Rigel. I am here to open the Gate between your world and mine."

Gordon reached a reassuring hand over to Leah. All memory of their quarrel was obliterated in the face of their present peril. He felt her slender fingers twine firmly with his. The warm contact gave them both new courage.

“We of Xoran need your planet and intend to take possession of it,” Arlok continued, “but the vast distance which separates Rigel from your solar system makes it impracticable to transport any considerable number of our people here in space-cars for, though our space-cars travel with practically the speed of light, it requires over five hundred and forty years for them to cross that great void. So I was sent as a lone pioneer to your Earth to do the work necessary here in order to open the Gate that will enable Xoran to cross the barrier in less than a minute of your time.

“That gate is the one through the fourth dimension, for Xoran and your planet in a four-dimensional universe are almost touching each other in spite of the great distance separating them in a three-dimensional universe. We of Xoran, being three-

dimensional creatures like you Earthlings, can not even exist on a four-dimensional plane. But we can, by the use of apparatus to open a Gate, pass through a thin sector of the fourth dimension and emerge in a far distant part of our three-dimensional universe.

“The situation of our two worlds,” Arlok continued, “is somewhat like that of two dots on opposite ends of a long strip of paper that is curved almost into a circle. To two-dimensional beings capable only of realizing and traveling along the two dimensions of the paper itself those dots might be many feet apart, yet in the third dimension straight across free space they might be separated by only the thousandth part of an inch. In order to take that short cut across the third dimension the two-dimensional creatures of the paper would have only to transform a small strip of the intervening space into a two-dimensional surface like their paper.

“They could, do this, of course, by the use of proper vibration-creating machinery, for all things in a material universe are merely a matter of vibration. We of Xoran plan to cross the barrier of the fourth

dimension by creating a narrow strip of vibrations powerful enough to exactly match and nullify those of the fourth dimension itself. The result will be that this narrow strip will temporarily become an area of three dimensions only, an area over which we can safely pass from our world to yours.”

Arlok indicated one of the pieces of apparatus along the opposite wall of the room. It was an intricate arrangement of finely wound coils with wires leading to scores of needle-like points which constantly shimmered and crackled with tiny blue-white flames. Thick cables ran to a bank of concave reflectors of some gleaming grayish metal.

“There is the apparatus which will supply the enormous power necessary to nullify the vibrations of the fourth dimensional barrier,” Arlok explained. “It is a condenser and adapter of the cosmic force that you call the Millikan rays. In Xoran a similar apparatus is already set up and finished, but the Gate can only be opened by simultaneous actions from both sides of the barrier. That is why I was sent on my long journey through space to do the necessary work here. I am

now nearly finished. A very few hours more will see the final opening of the Gate. Then the fighting hordes of Xoran can sweep through the barrier and overwhelm your planet.

“When the Gate from Xoran to a new planet is first opened,” Arlok continued, “our scientists always like to have at least one pair of specimens of the new world’s inhabitants sent through to them for experimental use. So to-night, while waiting for one of my final castings to cool, I improved the time by making a brief raid upon the place that you call the Maori Hut. The lady here seemed an excellent type of your Earthling women, and the meteoric iron in her necklace made a perfect focus for electric hypnosis. Her escort was too inferior a specimen to be of value to me so I killed him when he attempted to interfere. When you gave chase I lured you on until I could see whether you might be usable. You proved an excellent specimen, so I merely stunned you. Very soon now I shall be ready to send the two of you through the Gate to our scientists in Xoran.”

A cold wave of sheer horror swept over Gordon. It

was impossible to doubt the stark and deadly menace promised in the plan of this grim visitor from an alien universe—a menace that loomed not only for Gordon and Leah but for the teeming millions of a doomed and defenseless world.

“Let me show you Xoran,” Arlok offered. “Then you may be better able to understand.” He turned his back carelessly upon his two captives and strode over to the apparatus along the opposite wall.

Gordon longed to hurl himself upon the unprotected back of the retreating Xoranian, but he knew that any attempt of that kind would be suicidal. Arlok’s deadly tentacle would strike him down before he was halfway across the room.

He searched his surroundings with desperate eyes for anything that might serve as a weapon. Then his pulse quickened with sudden hope. There on a small table near Leah was the familiar bulk of a .45 calibre revolver, loaded and ready for use. It was included in a miscellaneous collection of other small earthly tools and objects that Arlok had apparently collected for

study.

There was an excellent chance that Leah might be able to secure the gun unobserved. Gordon pressed her fingers in a swift attempt at signalling, then jerked his head ever so slightly toward the table. A moment later the quick answering pressure of Leah's fingers told him that she had understood his message. From the corner of his eye Gordon saw Leah's other hand begin cautiously groping behind her for the revolver.

Then both Gordon and Leah froze into sudden immobility as Arlok faced them again from beside an apparatus slightly reminiscent of an earthly radio set. Arlok threw a switch, and a small bank of tubes glowed pale green. A yard-square plate of bluish-gray metal on the wall above the apparatus glowed with milky fluorescence.

"It is easy to penetrate the barrier with light waves," Arlok explained. "That is a Gate that can readily be opened from either side. It was through it that we first discovered your Earth."

Arlok threw a rheostat on to more power. The luminous plate cleared swiftly. "And there, Earthlings, is Xoran!" Arlok said proudly.

Leah and Gordon gasped in sheer amaze as the glowing plate became a veritable window into another world—a world of utter and alien terror.

The livid light of a giant red sun blazed mercilessly down upon a landscape from which every vestige of animal and plant life had apparently been stripped. Naked rocks and barren soil stretched illimitably to the far horizon in a vast monotony of utter desolation.

Arlok twirled the knob of the apparatus, and another scene flashed into view. In this scene great gleaming squares and cones of metal rose in towering clusters from the starkly barren land. Hordes of creatures like Arlok swarmed in and around the metal buildings. Giant machines whirled countless wheels in strange tasks. From a thousand great needle-like projections on the buildings spurted shimmering sheets of crackling flame, bathing the entire scene in a whirling mist of fiery vapors.

Gordon realized dimly that he must be looking into one of the cities of Xoran, but every detail of the chaotic whirl of activity was too utterly unfamiliar to carry any real significance to his bewildered brain. He was as hopelessly overwhelmed as an African savage would be if transported suddenly into the heart of Times Square.

Arlok again twirled the knob. The scene shifted, apparently to another planet. This world was still alive, with rich verdure and swarming millions of people strangely like those of Earth. But it was a doomed world. The dread Gate to Xoran had already been opened here. Legions of bluish-gray Xorans were attacking the planet's inhabitants, and the attack of those metallic hosts was irresistible.

The slight bodies of the Xorans seemed as impervious to bullets and missiles as though armor-plated. The frantic defense of the beleaguered people of the doomed planet caused hardly a casualty in the Xoran ranks.

The attack of the Xorans was hideously effective.

Clouds of dense yellow fog belched from countless projectors in the hands of the bluish-gray hosts, and beneath that deadly miasma all animal and plant life on the doomed planet was crumbling, dying, and rotting into a liquid slime. Then even the slime was swiftly obliterated, and the Xoranians were left triumphant upon a world starkly desolate.

“That was one of the minor planets in the swarm that make up the solar system of the sun that your astronomers call Canopus,” Arlok explained. “Our first task in conquering a world is to rid it of the unclean surface scum of animal and plant life. When this noxious surface mold is eliminated, the planet is then ready to furnish us sustenance, for we Xoranians live directly upon the metallic elements of the planet itself. Our bodies are of a substance of which your scientists have never even dreamed—deathless, invincible, living metal!”

Arlok again twirled the control of the apparatus and the scene was shifted back to the planet of Xoran, this time to the interior of what was apparently a vast laboratory. Here scores of Xoranian scientists were

working upon captives who were pathetically like human beings of Earth itself, working with lethal gases and deadly liquids as human scientists might experiment upon noxious pests. The details of the scene were so utterly revolting, the tortures that were being inflicted so starkly horrible, that Leah and Gordon sank back in their chairs sick and shaken.

Arlok snapped off a switch, and the green light in the tubes died. "That last scene was the laboratory to which I shall send you two presently," he said callously as he started back across the room toward them.

Gordon lurched to his feet, his brain a seething whirl of hate in which all thought of caution was gone as he tensed his muscles to hurl himself upon that grim monstrosity from the bleak and desolate realm of Xoran.

Then he felt Leah tugging surreptitiously at his right hand. The next moment the bulk of something cold and hard met his fingers. It was the revolver. Leah had secured it while Arlok was busy with his inter-

dimensional televisor.

Arlok was rapidly approaching them. Gordon hoped against hope that the menace of that deadly tentacle might be diverted for the fraction of a second necessary for him to get in a crippling shot. Leah seemed to divine his thought. She suddenly screamed hysterically and flung herself on the floor almost at Arlok's feet.

Arlok stopped in obvious wonder and bent over Leah. Gordon took instant advantage of the Xoranian's diverted attention. He whipped the revolver from behind him and fired point-blank at Arlok's unprotected head.

The bullet struck squarely, but Arlok was not even staggered. A tiny spot of bluish-gray skin upon his oval skull gleamed faintly for a moment under the bullet's impact. Then the heavy pellet of lead, as thoroughly flattened as though it had struck the triple armor of a battleship, dropped spent and harmless to the floor.

Arlok straightened swiftly. For the moment he seemed to have no thought of retaliating with his deadly tentacle. He merely stood there quite still with one thin arm thrown up to guard his glowing eyes.

Gordon sent the remainder of the revolver's bullets crashing home as fast as his finger could press the trigger. At that murderously short range the smashing rain of lead should have dropped a charging gorilla. But for all the effect Gordon's shots had upon the Xoranian, his ammunition might as well have been pellets of paper. Arlok's glossy hide merely, glowed momentarily in tiny patches as the bullets struck and flattened harmlessly—and that was all.

His last cartridge fired, Gordon flung the empty weapon squarely at the blue monstrosity's hideous face. Arlok made no attempt to dodge. The heavy revolver struck him high on the forehead, then rebounded harmlessly to the floor. Arlok paid no more attention to the blow than a man would to the casual touch of a wind-blown feather.

Gordon desperately flung himself forward upon the

Xoranian in one last mad effort to overwhelm him. Arlok dodged Gordon's wild blows, then gently swept the Earth man into the embrace of his thin arms. For one helpless moment Gordon sensed the incredible strength and adamant hardness of the Xoranian's slender figure, together with an overwhelming impression of colossal weight in that deceptively slight body.

Then Arlok contemptuously flung Gordon away from him. As Gordon staggered backward, Arlok's tentacle lashed upward and levelled upon him. Its twin tips again glowed brilliant green and livid blue. Instantly every muscle in Gordon's body was paralyzed. He stood there as rigid as a statue, his body completely deadened from the neck down. Beside him stood Leah, also frozen motionless in that same weird power.

"Earthling, you are beginning to try my patience," Arlok snapped. "Can you not realize that I am utterly invincible in any combat with you? The living metal of my body weighs over sixteen hundred pounds, as you measure weight. The strength inherent in that metal

is sufficient to tear a hundred of your Earth men to shreds. But I do not even have to touch you to vanquish you. The electric content of my bodily structure is so infinitely superior to yours that with this tentacle-organ of mine I can instantly short-circuit the feeble currents of your nerve impulses and bring either paralysis or death as I choose.

“But enough of this!” Arlok broke off abruptly. “My materials are now ready, and it is time that I finished my work. I shall put you out of my way for a few hours until I am ready to send you through the Gate to the laboratories of Xoran.”

The green and blue fire of the tentacle’s tips flamed to dazzling brightness. The paralysis of Gordon’s body swept swiftly over his brain. Black oblivion engulfed him.

When Gordon again recovered consciousness he found that he was lying on the floor of what was apparently a narrow hall, near the foot of a stairway. His hands were lashed tightly behind him, and his feet and legs were so firmly pinioned together that he

could scarcely move.

Beside him lay Leah, also tightly bound. A short distance down the hall was the closed door of Arlok's work-room, recognizable by the thin line of red light gleaming beneath it.

Moonlight through a window at the rear of the hall made objects around Gordon fairly clear. He looked at Leah and saw tears glistening on her long lashes.

"Oh, Blair, I was afraid you'd never waken again," the girl sobbed. "I thought that fiend had killed you!" Her voice broke hysterically.

"Steady, darling," Gordon said soothingly. "We simply can't give up now, you know. If that monstrosity ever opens that accursed Gate of his our entire world is doomed. There must be some way to stop him. We've got to find that way and try it—even if it seems only one forlorn chance in a million."

Gordon shook his head to clear the numbness still lingering from the effect of Arlok's tentacle. The

Xoranian seemed unable to produce a paralysis of any great duration with his weird natural weapon.

Accordingly, he had been forced to bind his captives like two trussed fowls while he returned to his labors.

Lying close together as they were, it was a comparatively easy matter for them to get their bound hands within reach of each other, but after fifteen minutes of vain work Gordon realized that any attempt at untying the ropes was useless. Arlok's prodigious strength had drawn the knots so tight that no human power could ever loosen them.

Then Gordon suddenly thought of the one thing in his pockets that might help them. It was a tiny cigarette lighter, of the spring-trigger type. It was in his vest pocket completely out of reach of his bound hands, but there was a way out of that difficulty.

Gordon and Leah twisted and rolled their bodies like two contortionists until they succeeded in getting into such a position that Leah was able to get her teeth in the cloth of the vest pocket's edge. A moment of desperate tugging, then the fabric gave way. The

lighter dropped from the torn pocket to the floor, where Leah retrieved it.

Then they twisted their bodies back to back. Leah managed to get the lighter flaming in her bound hands. Gordon groped in an effort to guide the ropes on his wrists over the tiny flickering flame.

Then there came the faint welcome odor of smoldering rope as the lighter's tiny flame bit into the bonds. Gordon bit his lips to suppress a cry of pain as the flame seared into his skin as well. The flame bit deeper into the rope. A single strand snapped.

Then another strand gave way. To Gordon the process seemed endless as the flame scorched rope and flesh alike. A long minute of lancing agony that seemed hours—then Gordon could stand no more. He tensed his muscles in one mighty agonized effort to end the torture of the flame.

The weakened rope gave way completely beneath that pain-maddened lunge. Gordon's hands were free. It was an easy matter now to use the lighter to finish

freeing himself and Leah. They made their way swiftly back to the window at the rear of the hall. It slid silently upward. A moment later, and they were out in the brilliant moonlight—free.

They made their way around to the front of the house. Behind the drawn shades of one of the front rooms an eery glow of red light marked the location of Arlok's work-room. They heard the occasional clink of tools inside the room as the Xoranian diligently worked to complete his apparatus.

They crept stealthily up to where one of the French windows of Arlok's work-room swung slightly ajar. Through the narrow crevice they could see Arlok's grotesque back as he labored over the complex assembly of apparatus against the wall.

A heavy stone flung through the window would probably wreck that delicate mechanism completely, yet the two watchers knew that such a respite would be only a temporary one. As long as Arlok remained alive on this planet to build other gates to Xoran, Earth's eventual doom was certain. Complete

destruction of Arlok himself was Earth's only hope of salvation.

The Xoranian seemed to be nearing the end of his labors. He left the apparatus momentarily and walked over to a work-bench where he picked up a slender rod-like tool. Donning a heavy glove to shield his left hand, he selected a small plate of bluish-gray metal, then pressed a switch in the handle of the tool in his right hand.

A blade of blinding white flame, seemingly as solid as a blade of metal, spurted for the length of a foot from the tool's tip. Arlok began cutting the plate with the flame, the blade shearing through the heavy metal as easily as a hot knife shears through butter.

The sight brought a sudden surge of exultant hope to Gordon. He swiftly drew Leah away from the window, far enough to the side that their low-voiced conversation could not be heard from inside the work-room.

"Leah, there is our one chance!" he explained

excitedly. “That blue fiend *is* vulnerable, and that flame-tool of his is the weapon to reach his vulnerability. Did you notice how careful he was to shield his other hand with a glove before he turned the tool on? He can be hurt by that blade of flame, and probably hurt badly.”

Leah nodded in quick understanding. “If I could lure him out of the room for just a moment, you could slip in through the window and get that flame-tool, Blair,” she suggested eagerly.

“That might work,” Gordon agreed reluctantly. “But, Leah, don’t run any more risks than you absolutely have to!” He picked up a small rock. “Here, take this with you. Open the door into the hall and attract Arlok’s attention by throwing the rock at his precious apparatus. Then the minute he sees you, try to escape out through the hall again. He’ll leave his work to follow you. When he returns to his work-room I’ll be in there waiting for him. And I’ll be waiting with a weapon that can stab through even that armor-plated hide of his!”

They separated, Leah to enter the house, Gordon to return to the window.

Arlok was back over in front of the apparatus, fitting into place the piece of metal he had just cut. The flame-tool, its switch now turned off, was still on the work-bench.

Gordon's heart pounded with excitement as he crouched there with his eyes fixed upon the closed hall door. The minutes seemed to drag interminably. Then suddenly Gordon's muscles tensed. The knob of the hall door had turned ever so slightly. Leah was at her post!

The next moment the door was flung open with a violence that sent it slamming back against the wall. The slender figure of Leah stood framed in the opening, her dark eyes blazing as she flung one hand up to hurl her missile.

Arlok whirled just as Leah threw the rock straight at the intricate Gate-opening apparatus. With the speed of thought the Xoranian flung his own body over to

shield his fragile instruments. The rock thudded harmlessly against his metallic chest.

Then Arlok's tentacle flung out like a striking cobra, its forked tip flaming blue and green fire as it focussed upon the open door. But Leah was already gone. Gordon heard her flying footsteps as she raced down the hall. Arlok promptly sped after her in swift pursuit.

As Arlok passed through the door into the hall Gordon flung himself into the room, and sped straight for the work-bench. He snatched the flame-tool up, then darted over to the wall by the door. He was not a second too soon. The heavy tread of Arlok's return was already audible in the hall just outside.

Gordon prepared to stake everything upon his one slim chance of disabling that fearful tentacle before Arlok could bring it into action. He pressed the tiny switch in the flame-tool's handle just as Arlok came through the door.

Arlok, startled by the glare of the flame-tool's blazing

blade, whirled toward Gordon—but too late. That thin searing shaft of vivid flame had already struck squarely at the base of the Xoranian's tentacle. A seething spray of hissing sparks marked the place where the flame bit deeply home. Arlok screamed, a ghastly metallic note of anguish like nothing human.

The Xoranian's powerful hands clutched at Gordon, but he leaped lithely backward out of their reach. Then Gordon again attacked, the flame-tool's shining blade licking in and out like a rapier. The searing flame swept across one of Arlok's arms, and the Xoranian winced. Then the blade stabbed swiftly at Arlok's waist. Arlok half-doubled as he flinched back. Gordon shifted his aim with lightning speed and sent the blade of flame lashing in one accurate terrible stroke that caught Arlok squarely in the eyes.

Again Arlok screamed in intolerable agony as that tearing flame darkened forever his glowing eyes. In berserker fury the tortured Xoranian charged blindly toward Gordon. Gordon warily dodged to one side. Arlok, sightless, and with his tentacle crippled, still had enough power in that mighty metallic body of his

to tear a hundred Earth men to pieces.

Gordon stung Arlok's shoulder with the flame, then desperately leaped to one side just in time to dodge a flailing blow that would have made pulp of his body had it landed.

Arlok went stark wild in his frenzied efforts to come to grips with his unseen adversary. Furniture crashed and splintered to kindling wood beneath his threshing feet. Even the stout walls of the room shivered and cracked as the incredible weight of Arlok's body caromed against them.

Gordon circled lithely around the crippled blue monstrosity like a timber wolf circling a wounded moose. He began concentrating his attack upon Arlok's left leg. Half a dozen deep slashes with the searing flame—then suddenly the thin leg crumpled and broke. Arlok crashed helplessly to the floor.

Gordon was now able to shift his attack to Arlok's head. Dodging the blindly flailing arms of the Xoranian, he stabbed again and again at that oval-

shaped skull.

The searing thrusts began to have their effect. Arlok's convulsive movements became slower and weaker. Gordon sent the flame stabbing in a long final thrust in an attempt to pierce through to that alien metal brain.

With startling suddenness the flame burned its way home to some unknown center of life force in the oval skull. There was a brief but appalling gush of bright purple flame from Arlok's eye-sockets and mouth orifice. Then his twitching body stiffened. His bluish-gray hide darkened with incredible swiftness into a dull black. Arlok was dead.

Gordon, sickened at the grisly ending to the battle, snapped off the flame-tool and turned to search for Leah. He found her already standing in the hall door, alive, and unhurt.

"I escaped through the window at the end of the hall," she explained. "Arlok quit following me as soon as he saw that you too were gone from where he had left us

“tied.” She shuddered as she looked down at the Xoranian’s mangled body. “I saw most of your fight with him, Blair. It was terrible; awful. But, Blair, we’ve won!”

“Yes, and now we’ll make sure of the fruits of our victory,” Gordon said grimly, starting over toward the Gate-opening apparatus with the flame-tool in his hand. A very few minutes’ work with the shearing blade of flame reduced the intricate apparatus to a mere tangled pile of twisted metal.

Arlok, Gate-opener of Xoran, was dead—and the Gate to that grim planet was now irrevocably closed!

“Blair, do you feel it too, that eery feeling of countless eyes still watching us from Xoran?” There was frank awe in Leah’s half-whispered question. “You know Arlok said that they had watched us for centuries from their side of the barrier. I’m sure they’re watching us now. Will they send another Opener of Gates to take up the work where Arlok failed?”

Gordon took Leah into his arms. “I don’t know, dear,”

he admitted gravely. "They may send another messenger, but I doubt it. This world of ours has had its warning, and it will heed it. The watchers on Xoran must know that in the five hundred and forty years it would take their next messenger to get here, the Earth will have had more than enough time to prepare an adequate defense for even Xoran's menace. I doubt if there will ever again be an attempt made to open the Gate to Xoran."

#67 The Eye Of Allah, By Charles Willard Diffin:

On the fatal seventh of September a certain secret service man sat in the president's chair and—looked back into the Eye of Allah.

Aproximate word count: 8,100

Bigotry: The islamomisia is pretty implicit from the title.

Warnings:

The great ship tore apart



- - -

On the fatal seventh of September a certain Secret Service man sat in the President's chair and—looked back into the Eye of Allah.

Blinky Collins' part in this matter was very brief. Blinky lasted just long enough to make a great discovery, to brag about it as was Blinky's way, and then pass on to find his reward in whatever hereafter is set apart for weak-minded crooks whose heads are not hard enough to withstand the crushing impact of a lead-filled pacifier.

The photograph studio of Blinky Collins was on the third floor of a disreputable building in an equally unsavory part of Chicago. There were no tinted pictures of beautiful blondes nor of stern, square-jawed men of affairs in Blinky's reception room. His clients, who came furtively there, were strongly opposed to having their pictures taken—they came for other purposes. For the photographic work of Mr. Collins was strictly commercial—and peculiar. There were fingerprints to be photographed and identified

for purpose of private revenge, photographs of people to be merged and repictured in compromising closeness for reasons of blackmail. And even X-Ray photography was included in the scope of his work.

The great discovery came when a box was brought to the dingy room and Mr. Collins was asked to show what was inside it without the bother and inconvenience of disturbing lock and seals. The X-Ray machine sizzled above it, and a photographic plate below was developed to show a string of round discs that could easily have been pearls.

The temporary possessor of the box was pleased with the result—but Blinky was puzzled. For the developer had brought out an odd result. There were the pearls as expected, but, too, there was a small picture superimposed—a picture of a bald head and a body beneath seated beside a desk. The picture had been taken from above looking straight down, and head and desk were familiar.

Blinky knew them both. The odd part was that he knew also that both of them were at that instant on

the ground floor of the same disreputable building, directly under and two floors below his workshop.

Like many great discoveries, this of Blinky's came as the result of an accident. He had monkeyed with the X-Ray generator and had made certain substitutions. And here was the result—a bald head and a desk, photographed plainly through two heavy wood floors. Blinky scratched his own head in deep thought. And then he repeated the operation.

This time there was a blonde head close to the bald one, and two people were close to the desk and to each other. Blinky knew then that there were financial possibilities in this new line of portrait work.

It was some time before the rat eyes of the inventor were able to see exactly what they wanted through this strange device, but Blinky learned. And he fitted a telescope back of the ray and found that he could look along it and see as if through a great funnel what was transpiring blocks and blocks away; he looked where he would, and brick walls or stone were like glass when the new ray struck through them.

Blinky never knew what he had—never dreamed of the tremendous potentialities in his oscillating ethereal ray that had a range and penetration beyond anything known. But he knew, in a vague way, that this ray was a channel for light waves to follow, and he learned that he could vary the range of the ray and that whatever light was shown at the end of that range came to him as clear and distinct as if he were there in the room.

He sat for hours, staring through the telescope. He would train the device upon a building across the street, then cut down the current until the unseen vibration penetrated inside the building. If there was nothing there of interest he would gradually increase the power, and the ray would extend out and still out into other rooms and beyond them to still others. Blinky had a lot of fun, but he never forgot the practical application of the device—practical, that is, from the distorted viewpoint of a warped mind.

“I’ve heard about your machine,” said a pasty-faced man one day, as he sat in Blinky’s room, “and I think it’s a lot of hooey. But I’d give just one grand to know

who is with the district attorney this minute.”

“Where is he?” asked Blinky.

“Two blocks down the street, in the station house ... and if Pokey Barnard is with him, the lousy stool-pigeon—”

Blinky paid no attention to the other’s opinion of one Pokey Barnard; he was busy with a sputtering blue light and a telescope behind a shield of heavy lead.

“Put your money on the table,” he said, finally:
“there’s the dicks ... and there’s Pokey. Take a look—”

It was some few minutes later that Blinky learned of another valuable feature in his ray. He was watching the district attorney when the pasty-faced man brushed against a hanging incandescent light. There was a bit of bare wire exposed, and as it swung into the ray the fuses in the Collins studio blew out instantly.

But the squinting eyes at the telescope had seen

something first. They had seen the spare form of the district attorney throw itself from the chair as if it had been dealt a blow—or had received an electric shock.

Blinky put in new fuses—heavier ones—and tried it again on another subject. And again the man at the receiving end got a shot of current that sent him sprawling.

“Now what the devil—” demanded Blinky. He stood off and looked at the machine, the wire with its 110 volts, the invisible ray that was streaming out.

“It’s insulated, the machine is,” he told his caller, “so the juice won’t shoot back if I keep my hands off; but why,” he demanded profanely, “don’t it short on the first thing it touches?”

He was picturing vaguely a ray like a big insulated cable, with light and current both traveling along a core at its center, cut off, insulated by the ray, so that only the bare end where the ray stopped could make contact.

“Some more of them damn electrons.” he hazarded; then demanded of his caller: “But am I one hell of a smart guy? Or am I?”

There was no denying this fact. The pasty-faced man told Blinky with lurid emphasis just how smart. He had seen with his own eyes and this was too good to keep.

He paid his one grand and departed, first to make certain necessary arrangements for the untimely end of one Pokey Barnard, squealer, louse, et cetera, et cetera, and then to spread the glad news through the underworld of Collins’ invention.

That was Blinky’s big mistake, as was shown a few days later. Not many had taken seriously the account of the photographer’s experiments, but there was one who had, as was evident. A bearded man, whose eyes stared somewhat wildly from beneath a shock of frowzy hair, entered the Collins work-room and locked the door behind him. His English was imperfect, but the heavy automatic in his hand could not be misunderstood. He forced the trembling inventor to

give a demonstration, and the visitor's face showed every evidence of delight.

"The cur-rent," he demanded with careful words, "the electreek cur-rent, you shall do also. Yes?"

Again the automatic brought quick assent, and again the visitor showed his complete satisfaction. Showed it by slugging the inventor quietly and efficiently and packing the apparatus in the big suitcase he had brought.

Blinky Collins had been fond of that machine. He had found a form of television with uncounted possibilities, and it had been for him the perfect instrument of a blackmailing Peeping Tom; he had learned the secret of directed wireless transmission of power and had seen it as a means for annoying his enemies. Yet Blinky Collins—the late Blinky Collins—offered no least objection, when the bearded man walked off with the machine. His body, sprawled awkwardly in the corner, was quite dead....

And now, some two months later, in his Washington

office, the Chief of the United States Secret Service pushed a paper across his desk to a waiting man and leaned back in his chair.

“What would you make of that, Del?” he asked.

Robert Delamater reached leisurely for the paper. He regarded it with sleepy, half-closed eyes.

There was a crude drawing of an eye at the top. Below was printed—not written—a message in careful, precise letters: “Take warning. The Eye of Allah is upon you. You shall instructions receive from time to time. Follow them. Obey.”

Delamater laughed. “Why ask me what I think of a nut letter like that. You’ve had plenty of them just as crazy.”

“This didn’t come to me,” said the Chief; “it was addressed to the President of the United States.”

“Well, there will be others, and we will run the poor sap down. Nothing out of the ordinary I should say.”

“That is what I thought—at first. Read this—” The big, heavy-set man pushed another and similar paper across the desk. “This one was addressed to the Secretary of State.”

Delamater did not read it at once. He held both papers to the light; his fingers touched the edges only.

“No watermark,” he mused; “ordinary white writing stock—sold in all the five and ten cent stores. Tried these for fingerprints I suppose?”.

“Read it,” suggested the Chief.

“Another picture of an eye,” said Delamater aloud, and read: “‘Warning. You are dealing with an emissary from a foreign power who is an unfriend of my country. See him no more. This is the first and last warning. The Eye of Allah watches.’”

“And what is this below—? ‘He did not care for your cigars, Mr. Secretary. Next time—but there must be no next time.’”

Delamater read slowly—lazily. He seemed only slightly interested except when he came to the odd conclusion of the note. But the Chief knew Delamater and knew how that slow indolence could give place to a feverish, alert concentration when work was to be done.

“Crazy as a loon,” was the man’s conclusion as he dropped the papers upon the desk.

“Crazy,” his chief corrected, “like a fox! Read the last line again; then get this—

“The Secretary of State *is* meeting with a foreign agent who is here very much incog. Came in as a servant of a real ambassador. Slipped quietly into Washington, and not a soul knew he was here. He met the Secretary in a closed room; no one saw him come or leave—”;

“Well, the Secretary tells me that in that room where nobody could see he offered this man a cigar. His visitor took it, tried to smoke it, apologized—and lit one of his own vile cigarettes.”

“Hm-m!” Delamater sat a little straighter in his chair; his eyebrows were raised now in questioning astonishment. “Dictaphone? Some employee of the Department listening in?”

“Impossible.”

“Now that begins to be interesting,” the other conceded. His eyes had lost their sleepy look. “Want me to take it on?”

“Later. Right now. I want you to take this visiting gentleman under your personal charge. Here is the name and the room and hotel where he is staying. He is to meet with the Secretary to-night—he knows where. You will get to him unobserved—absolutely unseen; I can leave that to you. Take him yourself to his appointment, and take him without a brass band. But have what men you want tail you and watch out for spies.... Then, when he is through, bring him back and deliver him safely to his room. Compray?”

“Right—give me Wilkins and Smeed. I rather think I can get this bird there and back without being seen,

but perhaps they may catch Allah keeping tabs on us at that.” He laughed amusedly as he took the paper with the name and address.

A waiter with pencil and order-pad might have been seen some hours later going as if from the kitchen to the ninth floor of a Washington hotel. And the same waiter, a few minutes later, was escorting a guest from a rear service-door to an inconspicuous car parked nearby. The waiter slipped behind the wheel.

A taxi, whose driver was half asleep, was parked a hundred feet behind them at the curb. As they drove away and no other sign of life was seen in the quiet street the driver of the taxi yawned ostentatiously and decided to seek a new stand. He neglected possible fares until a man he called Smeed hailed him a block farther on. They followed slowly after the first car ... and they trailed it again on its return after some hours.

“Safe as a church,” they reported to the driver of the first car. “We’ll swear that nobody was checking up on that trip.”

And: "O. K." Delamater reported to his chief the next morning. "Put one over on this self-appointed Allah that time."

But the Chief did not reply: he was looking at a slip of paper like those he had shown his operative the day before. He tossed it to Delamater and took up the phone.

"To the Secretary of State," Delamater read. "You had your warning. Next time you disobey it shall be you who dies."

The signature was only the image of an eye.

The Chief was calling a number; Delamater recognized it as that of the hotel he had visited.

"Manager, please, at once," the big man was saying.

He identified himself to the distant man. Then:

"Please check up on the man in nine four seven. If he doesn't answer, enter the room and report at once—I will hold the phone...."

The man at the desk tapped steadily with a pencil; Robert Delamater sat quietly, tensely waiting. But some sixth sense told him what the answer would be. He was not surprised when the Chief repeated what the phone had whispered.

“Dead?... Yes!... Leave everything absolutely undisturbed. We will be right over.”

“Get Doctor Brooks, Del,” he said quietly; “the Eye of Allah was watching after all.”

Robert Delamater was silent as they drove to the hotel. Where had he slipped? He trusted Smeed and Wilkins entirely; if they said his car had not been followed it had not. And the visitor had been disguised; he had seen to that. Then, where had this person stood—this being who called himself the Eye of Allah?

“Chief,” he said finally. “I didn’t slip—nor Wilkins or Smeed.”

“Someone did,” replied the big man, “and it wasn’t

the Eye of Allah, either.”

The manager of the hotel was waiting to take them to the room. He unlocked the door with his pass key.

“Not a thing touched,” he assured the Secret Service men; “there he is, just the way we found him.”

In the doorway between the bedroom and bath a body was huddled. Doctor Brooks knelt quickly beside it. His hands worked swiftly for a moment, then he rose to his feet.

“Dead,” he announced.

“How long?” asked the Chief.

“Some time. Hours I should say—perhaps eight or ten.”

“Cause?” the query was brief.

“It will take an autopsy to determine that. There is no blood or wound to be seen.”

The doctor was again examining the partly rigid body. He opened one hand; it held a cake of soap. There was a grease mark on the hand.

Delamater supplied the explanation. "He touched some grease on the old car I was using," he said. "Must have gone directly to wash it off. See—there is water spilled on the floor."

Water had indeed been splashed on the tile floor of the bath room; a pool of it still remained about the heavy, foreign-looking shoes of the dead man.

Something in it caught Delamater's eye. He leaned down to pick up three pellets of metal, like small shot, round and shining.

"I'll keep these," he said, "though the man was never killed with shot as small as that."

"We shall have to wait for the autopsy report," said the Chief crisply; "that may give the cause of death. Was there anyone in the room—did you enter it with him last night, Del?"

“No,” said the operative; “he was very much agitated when we got here—dismissed me rather curtly at the door. He was quite upset about something—spoke English none too well and said something about a warning and damned our Secret Service as inefficient.”

“A warning!” said the Chief. The dead man’s brief case was on the bed. He crossed to it and undid the straps; the topmost paper told the reason for the man’s disquiet. It showed the familiar, staring eye. And beneath the eye was a warning: this man was to die if he did not leave Washington at once.

The Chief turned to the hotel manager. “Was the door locked?”

“Yes.”

“But it is a spring lock. Someone could have gone out and closed it after him.”

“Not this time. The dead-bolt was thrown. It takes a key to do that from the outside or this thumb-turn on

the inside.” The hotel man demonstrated the action of the heavy bolt.

“Then, with a duplicate key, a man could have left this room and locked the door behind him.”

“Absolutely not. The floor-clerk was on duty all night. I have questioned her: this room was under her eyes all the time. She saw this man return, saw your man, here”—and he pointed to Delamater—“leave him at the door. There was no person left the room after that.”

“See about the autopsy, Doctor,” the Chief ordered.

And to the manager: “Not a thing here must be touched. Admit only Mr. Delamater and no one else unless he vouches for them.

“Del,” he told the operative, “I’m giving you a chance to make up for last night. Go to it.”

And Robert Delamater “went to it” with all the thoroughness at his command, and with a total lack of

result.

The autopsy helped not at all. The man was dead; it was apparently a natural death. “Not a scratch nor a mark on him,” was the report. But: “... next time it will be you,” the note with the staring eye had warned the Secretary of State. The writer of it was taking full credit for the mysterious death.

Robert Delamater had three small bits of metal, like tiny shot, and he racked his brain to connect these with the death. There were fingerprints, too, beautifully developed upon the mysterious missives—prints that tallied with none in the records. There were analyses of the paper—of the ink—and not a clue in any of them.

Just three pellets of metal. Robert Delamater had failed utterly, and he was bitter in the knowledge of his failure.

“He had you spotted, Del,” the Chief insisted. “The writer of these notes may be crazy, but he was clever enough to know that this man *did* see the Secretary.

And he was waiting for him when he came back; then he killed him.”

“Without a mark?”

“He killed him,” the Chief repeated; “then he left—and that’s that.”

“But,” Delamater objected, “the room clerk—”

“—took a nap,” broke in the Chief. But Delamater could not be satisfied with the explanation.

“He got his, all right,” he conceded, “—got it in a locked room nine stories above the street, with no possible means of bringing it upon himself—and no way for the murderer to escape. I tell you there is something more to this: just the letter to the Secretary, as if this Eye of Allah were spying upon him—”

The Chief waved all that aside. “A clever spy,” he insisted. “Too clever for you. And a darn good guesser; he had us all fooled. But we’re dealing with a

madman, not a ghost, and he didn't sail in through a ninth story window nor go out through a locked door; neither did he spy on the Secretary of State in his private office. Don't try to make a supernatural mystery out of a failure, Del."

The big man's words were tempered with a laugh, but there was an edge of sarcasm, ill-concealed.

And then came the next note. And the next. The letters were mailed at various points in and about the city; they came in a flood. And they were addressed to the President of the United States, to the Secretary of War—of the Navy—to all the Cabinet members. And all carried the same threat under the staring eye.

The United States, to this man, represented all that was tyrannical and oppressive to the downtrodden of the earth. He proposed to end it—this government first, then others in their turn. It was the outpouring of a wildly irrational mind that came to the office of the harassed Chief of the United States Secret Service, who had instructions to run this man down—this man who signed himself The Eye of Allah. And do

it quickly for the notes were threatening. Official Washington, it seemed, was getting jumpy and was making caustic inquiries as to why a Secret Service department was maintained.

The Chief, himself, was directing the investigation—and getting nowhere.

“Here is the latest,” he said one morning. “Mailed at New York.” Delamater and a dozen other operatives were in his office: he showed them a letter printed like all the others. There was the eye, and beneath were words that made the readers catch their breath.

“The Eye of Allah sees—it has warned—now it will destroy. The day of judgment is at hand. The battleship *Maryland* is at anchor in the Hudson River at New York. No more shall it be the weapon of a despot government. It will be destroyed at twelve o’clock on September fifth.”

“Wild talk,” said the Chief, “but today is the fourth. The Commander of the *Maryland* has been warned—approach by air or water will be impossible. I want

you men to patrol the shore and nail this man if he shows up. Lord knows what he intends—bluffing probably—but he may try some fool stunt. If he does—get him!”

Eleven-thirty by the watch on Robert Delamater’s wrist found him seated in the bow of a speed-boat the following morning. They patrolled slowly up and down the shore. There were fellow operatives, he knew, scores of them, posted at all points of vantage along the docks.

Eleven forty-five—and the roar of seaplanes came from above where air patrols were-guarding the skies. Small boats drove back and forth on set courses; no curious sight-seeing craft could approach the *Maryland* that day. On board the battleship, too, there was activity apparent. A bugle sounded, and the warning of bellowing Klaxons echoed across the water. Here, in the peace and safety of the big port, the great man-of-war was sounding general quarters, and a scurry of running men showed for an instant on her decks. Anti-aircraft guns swung silently upon imaginary targets—

The watcher smiled at the absurdity of it all—this preparation to repel the attack of a wild-eyed writer of insane threats. And yet—and yet— He knew, too, there was apprehension in his frequent glances at his watch.

One minute to go! Delamater should have watched the shore. And, instead, he could not keep his eyes from the big fighting-ship silhouetted so clearly less than a mile away, motionless and waiting—waiting—for what? He saw the great turreted guns, useless against this puny, invisible opponent. Above them the fighting tops were gleaming. And above them—

Delamater shaded his eyes with a quick, tense hand: the tip of the mast was sparkling. There was a blue flash that glinted along the steel. It was gone to reappear on the fighting top itself—then lower.

What was it? the watching man was asking himself. What did it bring to mind? A street-car? A defective trolley? The zipping flash of a contact made and broken? That last!

Like the touch of a invisible wire, tremendously charged, a wire that touched and retreated, that made and lost its contact, the flashing arc was working toward the deck. It felt its way to the body of the ship; the arc was plain, starting from mid-air to hiss against the armored side; the arc shortened—went to nothing—vanished.... A puff of smoke from an open port proved its presence inside. Delamater had the conviction that a deadly something had gone through the ship's side—was insulated from it—was searching with its blazing, arcing end for the ammunition rooms....

The realization of that creeping menace came to Delamater with a gripping, numbing horror. The seconds were almost endless as he waited. Slowly, before his terrified eyes, the deck of the great ship bulged upward ... slowly it rolled and tore apart ... a mammoth turret with sixteen-inch guns was lifting unhurriedly into the air ... there were bodies of men rocketing skyward....

The mind of the man was racing at lightning speed, and the havoc before him seemed more horrible in its

slow, leisurely progress. If he could only move—do something!

The shock of the blasted air struck him sprawling into the bottom of the boat; the listener was hammered almost to numbness by the deafening thunder that battered and tore through the still air. At top speed the helmsman drove for the shelter of a hidden cove. They made it an instant before the great waves struck high upon the sand spit. Over the bay hung a ballooning cloud of black and gray—lifting for an instant to show in stark ghastliness the wreckage, broken and twisted, that marked where the battleship *Maryland* rested in the mud in the harbor of New York.

The eyes of the Secret-Service men were filled with the indelible impress of what they had seen. Again and again, before him, came the vision of a ship full of men in horrible, slow disintegration; his mind was numbed and his actions and reactions were largely automatic. But somehow he found himself in the roar of the subway, and later he sat in a chair and knew he was in a Pullman of a Washington train.

He rode for hours in preoccupied silence, his gaze fixed unseeingly, striving to reach out and out to some distant, unknown something which he was trying to visualize. But he looked at intervals at his hand that held three metal pellets.

He was groping for the mental sequence which would bring the few known facts together and indicate their cause. A threat—a seeming spying within a closed and secret room—the murder on the ninth floor, a murder without trace of wound or weapon. Weapon! He stared again at the tangible evidence he held; then shook his head in perplexed abstraction. No—the man was killed by unknown means.

And now—the *Maryland*! And a visible finger of death—touching, flashing, feeling its way to the deadly cargo of powder sacks.

Not till he sat alone with his chief did he put into words his thoughts.

“A time bomb did it,” the Chief was saying. “The officials deny it, but what other answer is there? No

one approached that ship—you know that, Del—no torpedo nor aerial bomb! Nothing as fanciful as that!”

Robert Delamater’s lips formed a wry smile. “Nothing at fanciful as that”—and he was thinking, thinking—of what he hardly dared express.

“We will start with the ship’s personnel,” the other continued; “find every man who was not on board when the explosion occurred—”

“No use,” the operative interrupted; “this was no inside job, Chief.” He paused to choose his words while the other watched him curiously.

“Someone *did* reach that ship—reached it from a distance—reached it in the same way they reached that poor devil I left at room nine forty-seven. Listen —”

He told his superior of his vigil on the speed-boat—of the almost invisible flash against the ship’s mast. “He reached it, Chief,” he concluded; “he felt or saw his way down and through the side of that ship. And he

fired their ammunition from God knows where.”

“I wonder,” said the big man slowly; “I wonder if you know just what you are trying to tell me—just how absurd your idea is. Are you seriously hinting at long-distance vision through solid armor-plate—through these walls of stone and steel? And wireless power-transmission through the same wall—!”

“Exactly!” said the operative.

“Why, Del, you must be as crazy as this Eye of Allah individual. It’s impossible.”

“That word,” said Delamater, quietly, “has been crossed out of scientific books in the past few years.”

“What do you mean?”

“You have studied some physical science, of course?” Delamater asked. The Chief nodded.

“Then you know what I mean. I mean that up to recent years science had all the possibilities and

impossibilities neatly divided and catalogued. Ignorance, as always, was the best basis for positive assurance. Then they got inside the atom. And since then your real scientist has been a very humble man. He has seen the impossibility of yesterday become the established fact of to-day."

The Chief of the United States Secret Service was tapping with nervous irritation on the desk before him.

"Yes, yes!" he agreed, and again he looked oddly at his operative. "Perhaps there is something to that; you work along that line, Del: you can have a free hand. Take a few days off, a little vacation if you wish. Yes—and ask Sprague to step in from the other office; he has the personnel list."

Robert Delamater felt the other's eyes follow him as he left the room. "And that about lets me out," he told himself; "he thinks I've gone cuckoo, now."

He stopped in a corridor; his fingers, fumbling in a vest pocket, had touched the little metal spheres.

Again his mind flashed back to the chain of events he had linked together. He turned toward an inner office.

“I would like to see Doctor Brooks,” he said. And when the physician appeared: “About that man who was murdered at the hotel, Doctor—”

“Who died,” the doctor corrected; “we found no evidence of murder.”

“Who was murdered,” the operative insisted. “Have you his clothing where I can examine it?”

“Sure,” agreed the physician. He led Delamater to another room and brought out a box of the dead man’s effects.

“But if it’s murder you expect to prove you’ll find no help in this.”

The Secret Service man nodded. “I’ll look them over, just the same,” he said. “Thanks.”

Alone in the room, he went over the clothing piece by

piece. Again he examined each garment, each pocket, the lining, as he had done before when first he took the case. Metal, he thought, he must find metal.

But only when a heavy shoe was in his hands did the anxious frown relax from about his eyes.

“Of course,” he whispered, half aloud. “What a fool I was! I should have thought of that.”

The soles of the shoes were sewed, but, beside the stitches were metal specks, where cobbler’s nails were driven. And in the sole of one shoe were three tiny holes.

“Melted!” he said exultantly. “Crazy, am I, Chief? This man was standing on a wet floor; he made a perfect ground. And he got a jolt that melted these nails when it flashed out of him.”

He wrapped the clothing carefully and replaced it in the box. And he fingered the metal pellets in his pocket as he slipped quietly from the room.

He did not stop to talk with Doctor Brooks; he wanted to think, to ponder upon the incredible proof of the theory he had hardly dared believe. The Eye of Allah—the maniac—was real; and his power for evil! There was work to be done, and the point of beginning was not plain.

How far did the invisible arm reach? How far could the Eye of Allah see? Where was the generator—the origin of this wireless power; along what channel did it flow? A ray of lightless light—an unseen ethereal vibration.... Delamater could only guess at the answers.

The current to kill a man or to flash a spark into silken powder bags need not be heavy, he knew. Five hundred—a thousand volts—if the mysterious conductor carried it without resistance and without loss. People had been killed by house-lighting currents—a mere 110 volts—when conditions were right. There would be no peculiar or unusual demand upon the power company to point him toward the hidden maniac.

He tossed restlessly throughout the night, and morning brought no answer to his repeated questions. But it brought a hurry call from his Chief.

“Right away,” was the instruction; “don’t lose a minute. Come to the office.”

He found the big man at his desk. He was quiet, unhurried, but the operative knew at a glance the tense repression that was being exercised—the iron control of nerves that demanded action and found incompetence and helplessness instead.

“I don’t believe your fantastic theories,” he told Delamater. “Impractical—impossible! But—” He handed the waiting man a paper. “We must not leave a stone unturned.”

Delamater said nothing; he looked at the paper in his hand. “To the President of the United States,” he read. “Prepare to meet your God. Friday. The eighth. Twelve o’clock.”

The signature he hardly saw; the staring, open eye

was all too familiar.

“That is to-morrow,” said Delamater softly. “The President dies to-morrow.”

“No!” exploded the Chief. “Do you realize what that means? The President murdered—more killings to follow—and the killer unknown! Why the country will be in a panic: the whole structure of the Government is threatened!”

He paused, then added as he struck his open hand upon the desk: “I will have every available man at the White House.”

“For witnesses?” asked Delamater coldly.

The big man stared at his operative; the lines of his face were sagging.

“Do you believe—really—he can strike him down—at his desk—from a distance?”

“I know it.” Delamater’s fingers played for a moment

with three bits of metal in his pocket. Unconsciously he voiced his thoughts: “Does the President have nails in his shoes, I wonder?”

“What—what’s that?” the Chief demanded.

But Delamater made no reply. He was picturing the President. He would be seated at his desk, waiting, waiting ... and the bells would be ringing and whistles blowing from distant shops when the bolt would strike.... It would flash from his feet ... through the thick rug ... through the rug.... It would have to ground.

He paid no heed to his Chief’s repeated question. He was seeing, not the rug in the Presidential office, but below it—underneath it—a heavy pad of rubber.

“If he can be insulated—” he said aloud, and stared unseeingly at his eagerly listening superiors—“even the telephone cut—no possible connection with the ground—”

“For God’s sake, Del, if you’ve got an idea—any hope

at all! I'm—I'm up against it, Del."

The operative brought his distant gaze back to the room and the man across from him. "Yes," he said slowly, thoughtfully, "I've got the beginning of an idea; I don't see the end of it yet."

"We can cut him off from the ground—the President, I mean—make an insulated island where he sits. But this devil will get him the instant he leaves ... unless ... unless...."

"Yes—yes?" The Chief's voice was high-pitched with anxious impatience; for the first time he was admitting to himself his complete helplessness in this emergency.

"Unless," said Delamater, as the idea grew and took shape, "unless that wireless channel works both ways. If it does ... if it does...."

The big man made a gesture of complete incomprehension.

“Wait!” said Robert Delamater, sharply. If ever his sleepy indolence had misled his Chief, there was none to do so now in the voice that rang like cold steel. His eyes were slits under the deep-drawn brows, and his mouth was one straight line.

To the hunter there is no greater game than man. And Robert Delamater, man-hunter, had his treacherous quarry in sight. He fired staccato questions at his Chief.

“Is the President at his desk at twelve?”

“Yes.”

“Does he know—about this?”

“Yes.”

“Does he know it means death?”

The Chief nodded.

“I see a way—a chance,” said the operative. “Do I get

a free hand?”

“Yes—Good Lord, yes! If there’s any chance of—”

Delamater silenced him. “I’ll be the one to take the chance,” he said grimly. “Chief, I intend to impersonate the President.”

“Now listen— The President and I are about the same build. I know a man who can take care of the make-up; he will get me by anything but a close inspection. This Eye of Allah, up to now, has worked only in the light. We’ll have to gamble on that and work our change in the dark.

“The President must go to bed as usual—impress upon him that he may be under constant surveillance. Then, in the night, he leaves—

“Oh, I know he won’t want to hide himself, but he must. That’s up to you.

“Arrange for me to go to his room before daylight. From that minute on I am the President. Get me his

routine for that morning; I must follow it so as to arouse no least suspicion.”

“But I don’t see—” began the Chief. “You will impersonate him—yes—but what then? You will be killed if this maniac makes good. Is the President of the United States to be a fugitive? Is—”

“Hold on, hold on!” said Delamater. He leaned back in his chair; his face relaxed to a smile, then a laugh.

“I’ve got it all now. Perhaps it will work. If not—” A shrug of the shoulders completed the thought. “And I have been shooting it to you pretty fast haven’t I! Now here is the idea—

“I must be in the President’s chair at noon. This Allah person will be watching in, so I must be acting the part all morning. I will have the heaviest insulation I can get under the rug, and I’ll have something to take the shot instead of myself. And perhaps, perhaps I will send a message back to the Eye of Allah that will be a surprise.

“Is it a bet?” he asked. “Remember, I’m taking the chance—unless you know some better way—”

The Chief’s chair came down with a bang. “We’ll gamble on it, Del,” he said; “we’ve got to—there is no other way.... And now what do you want?”

“A note to the White House electrician,” said Robert Delamater, “and full authority to ask for anything I may need, from the U. S. Treasury down to a pair of wire-cutters.”

His smile had become contagious; the Chief’s anxious look relaxed. “If you pull this off, Del, they may give you the Treasury or the Mint at that. But remember, republics are notoriously ungenerous.”

“We’ll have to gamble on that, too,” said Robert Delamater.

The heart of the Nation is Washington. Some, there are, who would have us feel that New York rules our lives. Chicago—San Francisco—these and other great cities sometimes forget that they are mere ganglia on

the financial and commercial nervous system. The heart is Washington, and, Congress to the contrary notwithstanding, the heart of that heart is not the domed building at the head of Pennsylvania Avenue, but an American home. A simple, gracious mansion, standing in quiet dignity and whiteness above its velvet lawns.

It is the White House that draws most strongly at the interest and curiosity of the homely, common throng that visits the capital.

But there were no casual visitors at the White House on the seventh of September. Certain Senators, even, were denied admittance. The President was seeing only the members of the Cabinet and some few others.

It is given to a Secret Service operative, in his time, to play many parts. But even a versatile actor might pause at impersonating a President. Robert Delamater was acting the role with never a fumble. He sat, this new Robert Delamater, so startlingly like the Chief Executive, in the chair by a flat top desk.

And he worked diligently at a mass of correspondence.

Secretaries came and went; files were brought. Occasionally he replied to a telephone call—or perhaps called someone. It would be hard to say which happened, for no telephone bells rang.

On the desk was a schedule that Delamater consulted. So much time for correspondence—so many minutes for a conference with this or that official, men who were warned to play up to this new Chief Executive as if the life of their real President were at stake.

To any observer the busy routine of the morning must have passed with never a break. And there was an observer, as Delamater knew. He had wondered if the mystic ray might carry electrons that would prove its presence. And now he knew.

The Chief of the U. S. Secret Service had come for a consultation with the President. And whatever lingering doubts may have stifled his reluctant imagination were dispelled when the figure at the

desk opened a drawer.

“Notice this,” he told the Chief as he appeared to search for a paper in the desk. “An electroscope; I put it in here last night. It is discharging. The ray has been on since nine-thirty. No current to electrocute me—just a penetrating ray.”

He returned the paper to the drawer and closed it.

“So that is that,” he said, and picked up a document to which he called the visitor’s attention.

“Just acting,” he explained. “The audience may be critical; we must try to give them a good show! And now give me a report. What are you doing? Has anything else turned up? I am counting on you to stand by and see that that electrician is on his toes at twelve o’clock.”

“Stand by is right,” the Chief agreed; “that’s about all we can do. I have twenty men in and about the grounds—there will be as many more later on. And I know now just how little use we are to you, Del.”

“Your expression!” warned Delamater. “Remember you are talking to the President. Very official and all that.”

“Right! But now tell me what is the game, Del. If that devil fails to knock you out here where you are safe, he will get you when you leave the room.”

“Perhaps,” agreed the pseudo-executive, “and again, perhaps not. He won’t get me here; I am sure of that. They have this part of the room insulated. The phone wire is cut—my conversations there are all faked.

“There is only one spot in this room where that current can pass. A heavy cable is grounded outside in wet earth. It comes to a copper plate on this desk; you can’t see it—it is under those papers.”

“And if the current comes—” began the visitor.

“When it comes,” the other corrected, “it will jump to that plate and go off harmlessly—I hope.”

“And then what? How does that let you out?”

“Then we will see,” said the presidential figure. “And you’ve been here long enough, Chief. Send in the President’s secretary as you go out.”

“He arose to place a friendly, patronizing hand on the other’s shoulder.

“Good-by,” he said, “and watch that electrician at twelve. He is to throw the big switch when I call.”

“Good luck,” said the big man huskily. “We’ve got to hand it to you, Del; you’re—”

“Good-by!” The figure of the Chief Executive turned abruptly to his desk.

There was more careful acting—another conference—some dictating. The clock on the desk gave the time as eleven fifty-five. The man before the flat topped desk verified it by a surreptitious glance at his watch. He dismissed the secretary and busied himself with some personal writing.

Eleven fifty-nine—and he pushed paper and pen aside.

The movement disturbed some other papers, neatly stacked. They were dislodged, and where they had lain was a disk of dull copper.

“Ready,” the man called softly. “Don’t stand too near that line.” The first boom of noonday bells came faintly to the room.

The President—to all but the other actors in the morning’s drama—leaned far back in his chair. The room was suddenly deathly still. The faint ticking of the desk clock was loud and rasping. There was heavy breathing audible in the room beyond. The last noonday chime had died away....

The man at the desk was waiting—waiting. And he thought he was prepared, nerves steeled, for the expected. But he jerked back, to fall with the overturned chair upon the soft, thick-padded rug, at the ripping, crackling hiss that tore through the silent room.

From a point above the desk a blue arc flamed and wavered. Its unseen terminal moved erratically in the

air, but the other end of the deadly flame held steady upon a glowing, copper disc.

Delamater, prone on the floor, saw the wavering point that marked the end of the invisible carrier of the current—saw it drift aside till the blue arc was broken. It returned, and the arc crashed again into blinding flame. Then, as abruptly, the blue menace vanished.

The man on the floor waited, waited, and tried to hold fast to some sense of time.

Then: “Contact!” he shouted. “The switch! Close the switch!”

“Closed!” came the answer from a distant room. There was a shouted warning to unseen men: “Stand back there—back—there’s twenty thousand volts on that line—”

Again the silence....

“Would it work? Would it?” Delamater’s mind was full

of delirious, half-thought hopes. That fiend in some far-off room had cut the current meant as a death-bolt to the Nation's' head. He would leave the ray on—look along it to gloat over his easy victory. His generator must be insulated: would he touch it with his hand, now that his own current was off?—make of himself a conductor?

In the air overhead formed a terrible arc.

From the floor, Delamater saw it rip crashingly into life as twenty thousand volts bridged the gap of a foot or less to the invisible ray. It hissed tremendously in the stillness....

And Delamater suddenly buried his face in his hands. For in his mind he was seeing a rigid, searing body, and in his nostrils, acrid, distinct, was the smell of burning flesh.

“Don't be a fool,” he told himself fiercely. “Don't be a fool! Imagination!”

The light was out.

“Switch off!” a voice was calling. There was a rush of swift feet from the distant doors; friendly hands were under him—lifting him—as the room, for Robert Delamater, President-in-name of the United States, turned whirlingly, dizzily black....

Robert Delamater, U. S. Secret Service operative, entered the office of his Chief. Two days of enforced idleness and quiet had been all he could stand. He laid a folded newspaper before the smiling, welcoming man.

“That’s it, I suppose,” he said, and pointed to a short notice.

“X-ray Operator Killed,” was the caption. “Found Dead in Office in Watts Building.” He had read the brief item many times.

“That’s what we let the reporters have,” said the Chief.

“Was he”—the operative hesitated for a moment —“pretty well fried?”

“Quite!”

“And the machine?”

“Broken glass and melted metal. He smashed it as he fell.”

“The Eye of Allah,” mused Delamater. “Poor devil—poor, crazy devil. Well, we gambled—and we won. How about the rest of the bet? Do I get the Mint?”

“Hell, no!” said the Chief. “Do you expect to win all the time? They want to know why it took us so long to get him.

“Now, there’s a little matter out in Ohio, Del, that we’ll have to get after—”

#68 The Fifth-dimension Catapult, By Murray Leinster:

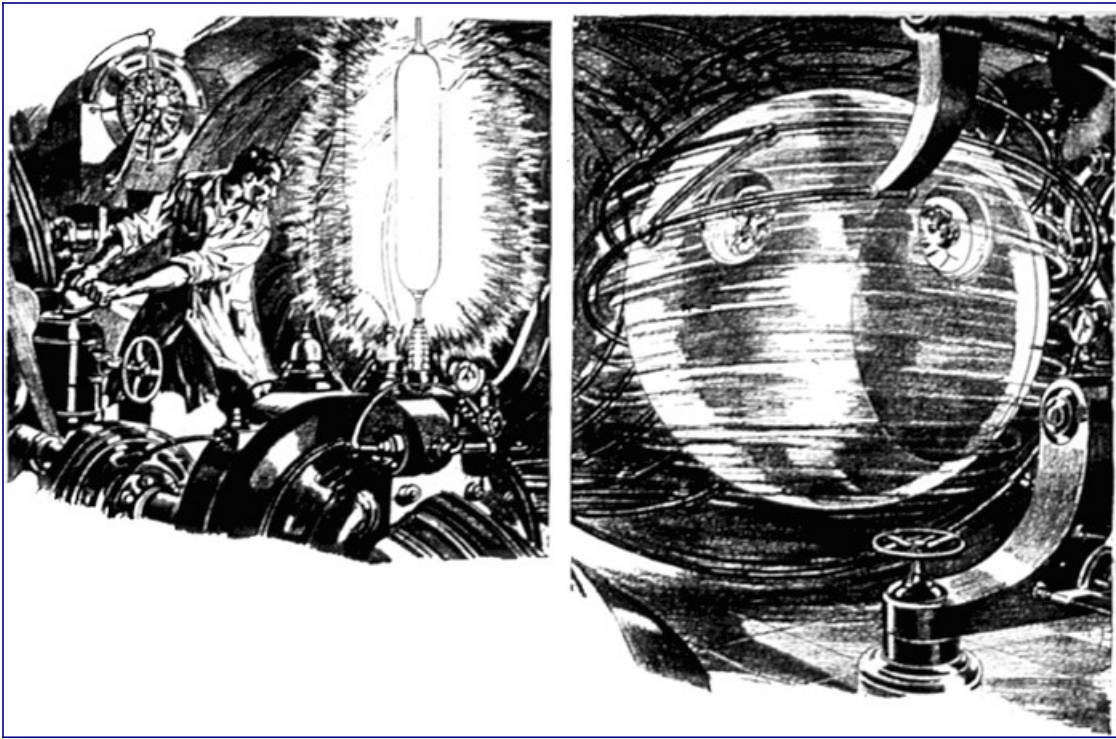
The story of Tommy Reames' extraordinary rescue of Professor Denham and his daughter—marooned in the fifth dimension.

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

which whirled madly



- - -

FOREWORD

This story has no normal starting-place, because there are too many places where it might be said to begin. One might commence when Professor Denham, Ph.D., M.A., etc., isolated a metal that scientists have been talking about for many years without ever being able to smelt. Or it might start with his first experimental use of that metal with entirely impossible results. Or it might very plausibly begin with an interview between a celebrated leader of gangsters in the city of Chicago and a spectacled

young laboratory assistant, who had turned over to him a peculiar heavy object of solid gold and very nervously explained, and finally managed to prove, where it came from. With also impossible results, because it turned “King” Jacaro, lord of vice-resorts and rum-runners, into a passionate enthusiast in non-Euclidean geometry. The whole story might be said to begin with the moment of that interview.

But that leaves out Smithers, and especially it leaves out Tommy Reames. So, on the whole, it is best to take up the narrative at the moment of Tommy’s first entrance into the course of events.

Chapter 1

He came to a stop in a cloud of dust that swirled up to and all about the big roadster, and surveyed the gate of the private road. The gate was rather impressive. At its top was a sign. "Keep Out!" Halfway down was another sign. "Private Property. Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted." On one gate-post was another notice, "Live Wires Within." and on the other a defiant placard. "Savage Dogs At Large Within This Fence."

The fence itself was all of seven feet high and made of the heaviest of woven-wire construction. It was topped with barbed wire, and went all the way down both sides of a narrow right of way until it vanished in the distance.

Tommy got out of the car and opened the gate. This fitted the description of his destination, as given him by a brawny, red-headed filling-station attendant in the village some two miles back. He drove the roadster through the gate, got out and closed it piously, got back in the car and shot it ahead.

He went humming down the narrow private road at forty-five miles an hour. That was Tommy Reames' way. He looked totally unlike the conventional description of a scientist of any sort—as much unlike a scientist as his sport roadster looked unlike a scientist's customary means of transit—and ordinarily he acted quite unlike one. As a matter of fact, most of the people Tommy associated with had no faintest inkling of his taste for science as an avocation. There was Peter Dalzell, for instance, who would have held up his hands in holy horror at the idea of Tommy Reames being the author of that article. “On the Mass and Inertia of the Tesseract,” which in the *Philosophical Journal* had caused a controversy.

And there was one Mildred Holmes—of no importance in the matter of the Fifth-Dimension Catapult—who would have lifted beautifully arched eyebrows in bored unbelief if anybody had suggested that Tommy Reames was that Thomas Reames whose “Additions to Herglotz's Mechanics of Continua” produced such diversities of opinion in scientific circles. She intended to make Tommy propose to her some day,

and thought she knew all about him. And everybody, everywhere, would have been incredulous of his present errand.

Gliding down the narrow, fenced-in road. Tommy was a trifle dubious about this errand himself. A yellow telegraph-form in his pocket read rather like a hoax, but was just plausible enough to have brought him away from a rather important tennis match. The telegram read:

PROFESSOR DENHAM IN EXTREME DANGER
THROUGH EXPERIMENT BASED ON YOUR ARTICLE
ON DOMINANT COORDINATES YOU ALONE CAN
HELP HIM IN THE NAME OF HUMANITY COME AT
ONCE.

A. VON HOLTZ.

The fence went on past the car. A mile, a mile and a half of narrow lane, fenced in and made as nearly intruder-proof as possible.

“Wonder what I’d do,” said Tommy Reames, “if

another car came along from the other end?”

He deliberately tried not to think about the telegram any more. He didn't believe it. He couldn't believe it. But he couldn't ignore it, either. Nobody could: few scientists, and no human being with a normal amount of curiosity. Because the article on dominant coordinates had appeared in the *Journal of Physics* and had dealt with a state of things in which the normal coordinates of everyday existence were assumed to have changed their functions: when the coordinates of time, the vertical, the horizontal and the lateral changed places and a man went east to go up and west to go “down” and ran his street-numbers in a fourth dimension. It was mathematical foolery, from one standpoint, but it led to some fascinating if abstruse conclusions.

But his brain would not remain away from the subject of the telegram, even though a chicken appeared in the fenced-in lane ahead of him and went flapping wildly on before the car. It rose in mid-air, the car overtook it as it rose above the level of the hood, and there was a rolling, squawking bundle of shedding

feathers tumbling over and over along the hood until it reached the slanting windshield. There it spun wildly upward, left a cloud of feather's fluttering about Tommy's head, and fell still squawking into the road behind. By the back-view mirror, Tommy could see it picking itself up and staggering dizzily back to the side of the road.

"My point was," said Tommy vexedly to himself, speaking of the article the telegram referred to, "that a man can only recognize three dimensions of space and one of time. So that if he got shot out of this cosmos altogether he wouldn't know the difference. He'd still seem to be in a three-dimensioned universe. And what is there in that stuff to get Denham in trouble?"

A house appeared ahead. A low, rambling sort of bungalow with a huge brick barn behind it. The house of Professor Denham, very certainly, and that barn was the laboratory in which he made his experiments.

Instinctively, Tommy stepped on the gas. The car leaped ahead. And then he was braking frantically. A

pipe-framed gate with thinner, unpainted wire mesh filling its surface loomed before him, much too late for him to stop. There was a minor shock, a crashing and squeaking, and then a crash and shattering of glass. Tommy bent low as the top bar of the gate hit his windshield. The double glass cracked and crumpled and bent, but did not fly to bits. And the car came to a halt with its wheels intricately entangled in torn-away fence wire. The gate had been torn from its hinges and was draped rakishly over the roadster. A tire went flat with a loud hissing noise, and Tommy Reames swore softly under his breath and got out to inspect the damage.

He was deciding that nothing irreparable was wrong when a man came bursting out of the brick building behind the house. A tall, lean, youngish man who waved his arms emphatically and approached shouting:

“You had no right to come in here! You must go away at once! You have damaged property! I will tell the Professor! You must pay for the damage! You must—”

“Damn!” said Tommy Reames. He had just seen that his radiator was punctured. A spout of ruddy, rusty water was pouring out on the grass.

The youngish man came up furiously. A pale young man, Tommy noticed. A young man with bristling, close-cropped hair and horn-rimmed spectacles before weak-looking eyes. His mouth was very full and very red, in marked contrast to the pallor of his cheeks.

“Did you not see the sign upon the gate?” he demanded angrily, in curiously stilted English. “Did you not see that trespassers are forbidden? You must go away at once! You will be prosecuted! You will be imprisoned! You—”

Tommy said irritably:

“Are you Von Holtz? My name is Reames. You telegraphed me.”

The waving, lanky arms stopped in the middle of an excited gesture. The weak-looking eyes behind the

lenses widened. A pink tongue licked the too-full, too-red lips.

“Reames? The Herr Reames?” Von Holtz stammered. Then he said suspiciously, “But you are not—you cannot be the Herr Reames of the article on dominant coordinates!”

“I don’t know why,” said Tommy annoyedly. “I’m also the Herr Reames of several other articles, such as on the mechanics of continua and the mass and inertia of the tesseract. And I believe the current *Philosophical Journal*—”

He surveyed the spouting red stream from the radiator and shrugged ruefully.

“I wish you’d telephone the village to have somebody come out and fix my car,” he said shortly, “and then tell me if this telegram is a joke or not.”

He pulled out a yellow form and offered it. He had taken an instinctive dislike to the lean figure before him, but suppressed the feeling.

Von Holtz took the telegram and read it, and smoothed it out, and said agitatedly:

“But I thought the Herr Reames would be—would be a venerable gentleman! I thought—”

“You sent that wire,” said Tommy. “It puzzled me just enough to make me rush out here. And I feel like a fool for having done it. What’s the matter? Is it a joke?”

Von Holtz shook his head violently, even as he bit his lips.

“No! No!” he protested. “The Herr Professor Denham is in the most terrible, most deadly danger! I—I have been very nearly mad, Herr Reames. The Ragged Men may seize him!... I telegraphed to you. I have not slept for four nights. I have worked! I have racked my brains! I have gone nearly insane, trying to rescue the Herr Professor! And I—”

Tommy stared.

“Four days?” he said. “The thing, whatever it is, has been going on for four days?”

“Five,” said Von Holtz nervously. “It was only to-day that I thought of you, Herr Reames. The Herr Professor Denham had praised your articles highly. He said that you were the only man who would be able to understand his work. Five days ago—”

Tommy grunted.

“If he’s been in danger for five days,” he said skeptically, “he’s not in such a bad fix or it’d have been over. Will you phone for a repairman? Then we’ll see what it’s all about.”

The lean arms began to wave again as Von Holtz said desperately:

“But Herr Reames, it is urgent! The Herr Professor is in deadly danger!”

“What’s the matter with him?”

“He is marooned,” said Von Holtz. Again he licked his lips. “He is marooned, Herr Reames, and you alone—”

“Marooned?” said Tommy more skeptically still. “In the middle of New York State? And I alone can help him? You sound more and more as if you were playing a rather elaborate and not very funny practical joke. I’ve driven sixty miles to get here. What is the joke, anyhow?”

Von Holtz said despairingly:

“But it is true, Herr Reames! He is marooned. He has changed his coordinates. It was an experiment. He is marooned in the fifth dimension!”

There was dead silence. Tommy Reames stared blankly. Then his gorge rose. He had taken an instinctive dislike to this lean young man, anyhow. So he stared at him, and grew very angry, and would undoubtedly have gotten into his car and turned it about and driven it away again if it had been in any shape to run. But it wasn’t. One tire was flat, and the last ruddy drops from the radiator were dripping

slowly on the grass. So he pulled out a cigarette case and lighted a cigarette and said sardonically:

“The fifth dimension? That seems rather extreme. Most of us get along very well with three dimensions. Four seems luxurious. Why pick on the fifth?”

Von Holtz grew pale with anger in his turn. He waved his arms, stopped, and said with stiff formality:

“If the Herr Reames will follow me into the laboratory I will show him Professor Denham and convince him of the Herr Professor’s extreme danger.”

Tommy had a sudden startling conviction that Von Holtz was in earnest. He might be mad, but he was in earnest. And there was undoubtedly a Professor Denham, and this was undoubtedly his home and laboratory.

“I’ll look, anyway,” said Tommy less skeptically. “But it is rather incredible, you know!”

“It is impossible,” said Von Holtz stiffly. “You are

right, Herr Reames. It is quite impossible. But it is a fact.”

He turned and stalked toward the big brick barn behind the house. Tommy went with him, wholly unbelieving and yet beginning to wonder if, just possibly, there was actually an emergency of a more normal and ghastly nature in being. Von Holtz might be a madman. He might....

Gruesome, grisly thoughts ran through Tommy's head. A madman dabbling in science might do incredible things, horrible things, and then demand assistance to undo an unimaginable murder....

Tommy was tense and alert as Von Holtz opened the door of the barnlike laboratory. He waved the lean young man on ahead.

“After you,” he said curtly.

He felt almost a shiver as he entered. But the interior of the laboratory displayed no gruesome scene. It was a huge, high-ceilinged room with a concrete floor. A

monster dynamo was over in one corner, coupled to a matter-of-fact four-cylinder crude-oil engine, to which was also coupled by a clutch an inexplicable windlass-drum with several hundred feet of chain wrapped around it. There were ammeters and voltmeters on a control panel, and one of the most delicate of dynamometers on its own stand, and there were work benches and a motor-driven lathe and a very complete equipment for the working of metals. And there was an electric furnace, with splashes of solidified metal on the floor beside it, and there was a miniature casting-floor, and at the farther end of the monster room there was a gigantic solenoid which evidently had once swung upon gymbals and as evidently now was broken, because it lay toppled askew upon its supports.

The only totally unidentifiable piece of apparatus in the place was one queer contrivance at one side. It looked partly like a machine-gun, because of a long brass barrel projecting from it. But the brass tube came out of a bulging casing of cast aluminum and there was no opening through which shells could be

fed.

Von Holz moved to that contrivance, removed a cap from the end of the brass tube, looked carefully into the opening, and waved stiffly for Tommy to look in.

Again Tommy was suspicious; watched until Von Holtz was some distance away. But the instant he put his eye to the end of the brass tube he forgot all caution, all suspicion, all his doubts. He forgot everything in his amazement.

There was a lens in the end of the brass tube. It was, in fact, nothing more or less than a telescope, apparently looking at something in a closed box. But Tommy was not able to believe that he looked at an illuminated miniature for even the fraction of a second. He looked into the telescope, and he was seeing out-of-doors. Through the aluminum casting that enclosed the end of the tube. Through the thick brick walls of the laboratory. He was gazing upon a landscape such as should not—such as could not—exist upon the earth.

There were monstrous, feathery tree-ferns waving languid fronds in a breeze that came from beyond them. The telescope seemed to be pointing at a gentle slope, and those tree-ferns cut off a farther view, but there was an impenetrable tangle of breast-high foliage between the instrument and that slope, and halfway up the incline there rested a huge steel globe.

Tommy's eyes fixed themselves upon the globe. It was man-made, of course. He could see where it had been bolted together. There were glassed-in windows in its sides, and there was a door.

As Tommy looked, that door opened partway, stopped as if someone within had hesitated, and then opened fully. A man came out. And Tommy said dazedly:

“My God!”

Because the man was a perfectly commonplace sort of individual, dressed in a perfectly commonplace fashion, and he carried a perfectly commonplace briar pipe in his hand. Moreover, Tommy recognized him.

He had seen pictures of him often enough, and he was Professor Edward Denham, entitled to put practically all the letters of the alphabet after his name, the author of "Polymerization of the Pseudo-Metallic Nitrides" and the proper owner of this building and its contents. But Tommy saw him against a background of tree-ferns such as should have been extinct upon this earth since the Carboniferous Period, some millions of years ago.

He was looking hungrily at his briar pipe. Presently he began to hunt carefully about on the ground. He picked together half a handful of brownish things which had to be dried leaves. He stuffed them into the pipe, struck a match, and lighted it. He puffed away gloomily, surrounded by wholly monstrous vegetation. A butterfly fluttered over the top of the steel globe. Its wings were fully a yard across. It flittered lightly to a plant and seemed to wait, and abruptly a vivid carmine blossom opened wide; wide enough to admit it.

Denham watched curiously enough, smoking the rank and plainly unsatisfying dried leaves. He turned his

head and spoke over his shoulder. The door opened again. Again Tommy Reames was dazed. Because a girl came out of the huge steel sphere—and she was a girl of the most modern and most normal sort. A trim sport frock, slim silken legs, bobbed hair....

Tommy did not see her face until she turned, smiling, to make some comment to Denham. Then he saw that she was breath-takingly pretty. He swore softly under his breath.

The butterfly backed clumsily out of the gigantic flower. It flew lightly away, its many-colored wings brilliant in the sunshine. And the huge crimson blossom closed slowly.

Denham watched the butterfly go away. His eyes returned to the girl who was smiling at the flying thing, now out of the field of vision of the telescope. And there was utter discouragement visible in every line of Denham's figure. Tommy saw the girl suddenly reach out her hand and put it on Denham's shoulder. She patted it, speaking in an evident attempt to encourage him. She smiled, and talked coaxingly, and

presently Denham made a queer, arrested gesture and went heavily back into the steel globe. She followed him, though she looked wearily all about before the door closed behind her, and when Denham could not see her face, her expression was tired and anxious indeed.

Tommy had forgotten Von Holtz, had forgotten the laboratory, had forgotten absolutely everything. If his original suspicions of Von Holtz had been justified, he could have been killed half a dozen times over. He was oblivious to everything but the sight before his eyes.

Now he felt a touch on his shoulder and drew his head away with a jerk. Von Holtz was looking down at him, very pale, with his weak-looking eyes anxious.

“They are still all right?” he demanded.

“Yes,” said Tommy dazedly. “Surely. Who is that girl?”

“That is the Herr Professor’s daughter Evelyn,” said Von Holtz uneasily. “I suggest, Herr Reames, that you

swing the dimensoscope about.”

“The—what?” asked Tommy, still dazed by what he had seen.

“The dimensoscope. This.” Von Holtz shifted the brass tube. The whole thing was mounted so that it could be swung in any direction. The mounting was exactly like that of a normal telescope. Tommy instantly put his eye to the eyepiece again.

He saw more tree-ferns, practically the duplicates of the background beyond the globe. Nothing moved save small, fugitive creatures among their fronds. He swung the telescope still farther. The landscape swept by before his eyes. The tree-fern forest drew back. He saw the beginning of a vast and noisome morass, over which lay a thick haze as of a stream raised by the sun. He saw something move in that morass; something huge and horrible with a long and snake-like neck and the tiniest of heads at the end of it. But he could not see the thing clearly.

He swung the telescope yet again. And he looked over

miles and miles of level, haze-blanketed marsh. Here and there were clumps of taller vegetation. Here and there were steaming, desolate pools. And three or four times he saw monstrous objects moving about clumsily in the marsh-land.

But then a glitter at the skyline caught his eye. He tilted the telescope to see more clearly, and suddenly he caught his breath. There, far away at the very horizon, was a city. It was tall and gleaming and very strange. No earthly city ever flung its towers so splendidly high and soaring. No city ever built by man gave off the fiery gleam of gold from all its walls and pinnacles. It looked like an artist's dream, hammered out in precious metal, with its outlines softened by the haze of distance.

And something was moving in the air near the city. Staring, tense, again incredulous, Tommy Reames strained his eyes and saw that it was a machine. An air-craft; a flying-machine of a type wholly unlike anything ever built upon the planet Earth. It swept steadily and swiftly toward the city, dwindling as it went. It swooped downward toward one of the mighty

spires of the city of golden gleams, and vanished.

It was with a sense of shock, of almost physical shock, that Tommy came back to realization of his surroundings to feel Von Holtz's hand upon his shoulder and to hear the lean young man saying harshly:

"Well, Herr Reames? Are you convinced that I did not lie to you? Are you convinced that the Herr Professor Denham is in need of help?"

Tommy blinked dazedly as he looked around the laboratory again. Brick walls, an oil-spattered crude-oil engine in one corner, a concrete floor and an electric furnace and a casting-box....

"Why—yes...." said Tommy dazedly. "Yes. Of course!" Clarity came to his brain with a jerk. He did not understand at all, but he believed what he had seen. Denham and his daughter were somewhere in some other dimension, yet within range of the extraordinary device he had looked through. And they were in trouble. So much was evident from their

poses and their manner. "Of course," he repeated. "They're—there, wherever it is, and they can't get back. They don't seem to be in any imminent danger...."

Von Holtz licked his lips.

"The Ragged Men have not found them yet," he said in a hushed, harsh voice. "Before they went in the globe we saw the Ragged Men. We watched them. If they do find the Herr Professor and his daughter, they will kill them very slowly, so that they will take days of screaming agony to die. It is that that I am afraid of, Herr Reames. The Ragged Men roam the tree-fern forests. If they find the Herr Professor they will trace each nerve to its root of agony until he dies. And we will be able only to watch...."

Chapter 2

“The thing is,” said Tommy feverishly, “that we’ve got to find a way to get them back. Whether it duplicates Denham’s results or not. How far away are they?”

“A few hundred yards, perhaps,” said Von Holtz wearily, “or ten million miles. It is the same thing. They are in a place where the fifth dimension is the dominant coordinate.”

Tommy was pacing up and down the laboratory. He stopped and looked through the eyepiece of the extraordinary vision apparatus. He tore himself away from it again.

“How does this thing work?” he demanded.

Von Holtz began to unscrew two wing-nuts which kept the top of the aluminum casting in place.

“It is the first piece of apparatus which Professor Denham made,” he said precisely. “I know the theory, but I cannot duplicate it. Every dimension is at right

angles to all other dimensions, of course. The Herr Professor has a note, here—”

He stopped his unscrewing to run over a heap of papers on the work-bench—papers over which he seemed to have been poring desperately at the time of Tommy’s arrival. He handed a sheet to Tommy, who read:

“If a creature who was aware of only two dimensions made two right-angled objects and so placed them that all the angles formed by the combination were right angles, he would contrive a figure represented by the corner of a box; he would discover a third dimension. Similarly, if a three-dimensioned man took three right angles and placed them so that all the angles formed were right angles, he would discover a fourth dimension. This, however, would probably be the time dimension, and to travel in time would instantly be fatal. But with four right angles he could discover a fifth dimension, and with five right angles he could discover a sixth....”

Tommy Reames put down the paper impatiently.

“Of course” he said brusquely. “I know all that stuff. But up to the present time nobody has been able to put together even three right angles, in practise.”

Von Holtz had returned to the unscrewing of the wing-nuts. He lifted off the cover of the dimensoscope.

“It is the thing the Herr Professor did not confide to me,” he said bitterly. “The secret. The one secret! Look in here.”

Tommy looked. The objective-glass at the end of the telescope faced a mirror, which was inclined to its face at an angle of forty-five degrees. A beam of light from the objective would be reflected to a second mirror, twisted in a fashion curiously askew. Then the light would go to a third mirror....

Tommy looked at that third mirror, and instantly his eyes ached. He closed them and opened them again. Again they stung horribly. It was exactly the sort of eye-strain which comes of looking through a lens which does not focus exactly, or through a strange

pair of eyeglasses. He could see the third mirror, but his eyes hurt the instant they looked upon it, as if that third mirror were distorted in an impossible fashion. He was forced to draw them away. He could see, though, that somehow that third mirror would reflect his imaginary beam of light into a fourth mirror of which he could see only the edge. He moved his head—and still saw only the edge of a mirror. He was sure of what he saw, because he could look into the wavy, bluish translucency all glass shows upon its edge. He could even see the thin layer of silver backing. But he could not put himself into a position in which more than the edge of that mirror was visible.

“Good Lord!” said Tommy Reames feverishly. “That mirror—”

“A mirror at forty-five degrees,” said Von Holtz precisely, “reflects light at a right angle. There are four mirrors, and each bends a ray of light through a right angle which is also a right angle to all the others. The result is that the dimensoscope looks into what is a fifth dimension, into which no man ever looked before. But I cannot move other mirrors into

the positions they have in this instrument. I do not know how.”

Tommy shook his head impatiently, staring at the so-simple, yet incredible device whose theory had been mathematically proven numberless times, but never put into practice before.

“Having made this device,” said Von Holtz, “the Herr Professor constructed what he termed a catapult. It was a coil of wire, like the large machine there. It jerked a steel ball first vertically, then horizontally, then laterally, then in a fourth-dimensional direction, and finally projected it violently off in a fifth-dimensional path. He made small hollow steel balls and sent a butterfly, a small sparrow, and finally a cat into that other world. The steel balls opened of themselves and freed those creatures. They seemed to suffer no distress. Therefore he concluded that it would be safe for him to go, himself. His daughter refused to permit him to go alone, and he was so sure of his safety that he allowed her to enter the globe with him. She did. I worked the catapult which flung the globe in the fifth dimension, and his device for

returning failed to operate. Hence he is marooned.”

“But the big catapult—”

“Can you not see that the big catapult is broken?” demanded Von Holtz bitterly. “A special metal is required for the missing parts. That, I know how to make. Yes. I can supply that. But I cannot shape it! I cannot design the gears which will move it as it should be moved! I cannot make another dimensoscope. I cannot, Herr Reames, calculate any method of causing four right angles to be all at right angles to each other. It is my impossibility! It is for that that I have appealed to you. You see it has been done. I see that it is done. I can make the metal which alone can be moved in the necessary direction. But I cannot calculate any method of moving it in that direction! If you can do so, Herr Reames, we can perhaps save the Herr Professor Denham. If you cannot—Gott! The death he will die is horrible to think of!”

“And his daughter,” said Tommy grimly. “His daughter, also.”

He paced up and down the laboratory again. Von Holtz moved to the work-bench from which he had taken Denham's note. There was a pile of such memoranda, thumbed over and over. And there were papers in the angular, precise handwriting which was Von Holtz's own, and calculations and speculations and the remains of frantic efforts to work out, somehow, the secret which as one manifestation had placed one mirror so that it hurt the eyes to look at it, and one other mirror so that from every angle of a normal existence, one could see only the edge.

"I have worked, Herr Reames," said Von Holtz drearily. "Gott! How I have worked! But the Herr Professor kept some things secret, and that so-essential thing is one of them."

Presently he said tiredly:

"The dimension-traveling globe was built in this laboratory. It rested here." He pointed. "The Herr Professor was laughing and excited at the moment of departure. His daughter smiled at me through the window of the globe. There was an under-carriage

with wheels upon it. You cannot see those wheels through the dimensoscope. They got into the globe and closed the door. The Herr Professor nodded to me through the glass window. The dynamo was running at its fullest speed. The laboratory smelled of hot oil, and of ozone from the sparks. I lifted my hand, and the Herr Professor nodded again, and I threw the switch. This switch, Herr Reames! It sparked as I closed it, and the flash partly blinded me. But I saw the globe rush toward the giant catapult yonder. It leaped upward into the huge coil, which whirled madly. Dazed, I saw the globe hanging suspended in mid-air, two feet from the floor. It shook! Once! Twice! With violence! Suddenly its outline became hazy and distorted. My eyes ached with looking at it. And then it was gone!”

Von Holtz’s arms waved melodramatically.

“I rushed to the dimensoscope and gazed through it into the fifth dimension. I saw the globe floating onward through the air, toward that bank of glossy ferns. I saw it settle and turn over, and then slowly right itself as it came to rest. The Herr Professor got

out of it. I saw him through the instrument which could look into the dimension into which he had gone. He waved his hand to me. His daughter joined him, surveying the strange cosmos in which they were. The Herr Professor plucked some of the glossy ferns, took photographs, then got back into the globe.

“I awaited its return to our own world. I saw it rock slightly as he worked upon the apparatus within. I knew that when it vanished from the dimensoscope it would have returned to our own universe. But it remained as before. It did not move. After three hours of anguished waiting, the Herr Professor came out and made signals to me of despair. By gestures, because no sound could come through the dimensoscope itself, he begged me to assist him. And I was helpless! Made helpless by the Herr Professor’s own secrecy! For four days and nights I have toiled, hoping desperately to discover what the Herr Professor had hidden from me. At last I thought of you. I telegraphed to you. If you can assist me....”

“I’m going to try it, of course,” said Tommy shortly.

He paced back and forth. He stopped and looked through the brass-tubed telescope. Giant tree-ferns, unbelievable but real. The steel globe resting partly overturned upon a bank of glossy ferns. Breast-high, incredible foliage between the point of vision and that extraordinary vehicle.

While Tommy had been talking and listening, while he had been away from the eyepiece, one or other of the occupants of the globe had emerged from it. The door was open. But now the girl came bounding suddenly through the ferns. She called, though it seemed to Tommy that there was a curious air of caution even in her calling. She was excited, hopefully excited.

Denham came out of the globe with a clumsy club in his hand. But Evelyn caught his arm and pointed up into the sky. Denham stared, and then began to make wild and desperate gestures as if trying to attract attention to himself.

Tommy watched for minutes, and then swung the dimensoscope around. It was extraordinary, to be sitting in the perfectly normal brick-walled laboratory,

looking into a slender brass tube, and seeing another universe entirely, another wild and unbelievable landscape.

The tree-fern forest drew back and the vast and steaming morass was again in view. There were distant bright golden gleams from the city. But Tommy was searching the sky, looking in the sky of a world in the fifth dimension for a thing which would make a man gesticulate hopefully.

He found it. It was an aircraft, startlingly close through the telescope. A single figure was seated at its controls, motionless as if bored, with exactly the air of a weary truck driver piloting a vehicle along a roadway he does not really see. And Tommy, being near enough to see the pilot's pose, could see the aircraft clearly. It was totally unlike a terrestrial airplane. A single huge and thick wing supported it. But the wing was angular and clumsy-seeming, and its form was devoid of the grace of an earthly aircraft wing, and there was no tail whatever to give it the appearance of a living thing. There was merely a long, rectangular wing with a framework beneath it, and a

shimmering thing which was certainly not a screw propeller, but which seemed to draw it.

It moved on steadily and swiftly, dwindling in the distance, with its motionless pilot seated before a mass of corded bundles. It looked as if this were a freight plane of some sort, and therefore made in a strictly utilitarian fashion.

It vanished in the haze above the monster swamp, going in a straight line for the golden city at the world's edge.

Tommy stared at it, long after it had ceased to be visible. Then he saw a queer movement on the earth near the edge of the morass. Figures were moving. Human figures. He saw four of them, shaking clenched fists and capering insanely, seeming to bellow insults after the oblivious and now invisible flying thing. He could see that they were nearly naked, and that one of them carried a spear. But the indubitable glint of metal was reflected from one of them for an instant, when some metal accoutrement about him glittered in the sunlight.

They moved from sight behind thick, feathery foliage, and Tommy swung back the brass tube to see the globe again. Denham and his daughter were staring in the direction in which Tommy had seen those human figures. Denham clutched his clumsy club grimly. His face was drawn and his figure tensed. And suddenly Evelyn spoke quietly, and the two of them dived into the fern forest and disappeared. Minutes later they returned, dragging masses of tree-fern fronds with which they masked the globe from view. They worked hastily, desperately, concealing the steel vehicle from sight. And then Denham stared tensely all about, shading his eyes with his hand. He and the girl withdrew cautiously into the forest.

It was minutes later that Tommy was roused by Von Holtz's hand on his shoulder.

"What has happened, Herr Reames?" he asked uneasily. "The—Ragged Men?"

"I saw men," said Tommy briefly, "shaking clenched fists at an aircraft flying overhead. And Denham and his daughter have hidden the globe behind a screen

of foliage.”

Von Holtz licked his lips fascinatedly.

“The Ragged Men,” he said in a hushed voice. “The Herr Professor called them that, because they cannot be of the people who live in the Golden City. They hate the people of the Golden City. I think that they are bandits; renegades, perhaps. They live in the tree-fern forests and scream curses at the airships which fly overhead. And they are afraid of those airships.”

“How long did Denham use this thing to look through, before he built his globe?”

Von Holtz considered.

“Immediately it worked,” he said at last, “he began work on a small catapult. It took him one week to devise exactly how to make that. He experimented with it for some days and began to make the large globe. That took nearly two months—the globe and the large catapult together. And also the dimensoscope was at hand. His daughter looked

through it more than he did, or myself.”

“He should have known what he was up against,” said Tommy, frowning. “He ought to have taken guns, at least. Is he armed?”

Von Holtz shook his head.

“He expected to return at once,” he said desperately. “Do you see, Herr Reames, the position it puts me in? I may be suspected of murder! I am the Herr Professor’s assistant. He disappears. Will I not be accused of having put him out of the way?”

“No,” said Tommy thoughtfully. “You won’t.” He glanced through the brass tube and paced up and down the room. “You telephone for someone to repair my car,” he said suddenly and abruptly. “I am going to stay here and work this thing out. I’ve got just the glimmering of an idea. But I’ll need my car in running order, in case we have to go out and get materials in a hurry.”

Von Holtz bowed stiffly and went out of the

laboratory. Tommy looked after him. Even moved to make sure he was gone. And then Tommy Reames went quickly to the work bench on which were the littered notes and calculations Von Holtz had been using and which were now at his disposal. But Tommy did not leaf through them. He reached under the blotter beneath the whole pile. He had seen Von Holtz furtively push something out of sight, and he had disliked and distrusted Von Holtz from the beginning. Moreover, it was pretty thoroughly clear that Denham had not trusted him too much. A trusted assistant should be able to understand, at least, any experiment performed in a laboratory.

A folded sheet of paper came out. Tommy glanced at it.

“You messed things up right! Denham marooned and you got nothing. No plans or figures either. When you get them, you get your money. If you don’t you are out of luck. If this Reames guy can’t fix up what you want it’ll be just too bad for you.”

There was no salutation nor any signature beyond a

scrawled and sprawling “J.”

Tommy Reames’ jaw set grimly. He folded the scrap of paper and thrust it back out of sight again.

“Pretty!” he said harshly. “So a gentleman named ‘J’ is going to pay Von Holtz for plans or calculations it is hoped I’ll provide! Which suggests—many things! But at least I’ll have Von Holtz’s help until he thinks my plans or calculations are complete. So that’s all right....”

Tommy could not be expected, of course, to guess that the note he had read was quite astounding proof of the interest taken in non-Euclidean geometry by a vice king of Chicago, or that the ranking beer baron of that metropolis was the man who was so absorbed in abstruse theoretic physics.

Tommy moved toward the great solenoid which lay askew upon its wrecked support. It had drawn the steel globe toward it, had made that globe vibrate madly, twice, and then go hazy and vanish. It had jerked the globe in each of five directions, each at

right angles to all the others, and had released it when started in the fifth dimension. The huge coil was quite nine feet across and would take the steel globe easily. It was pivoted in concentric rings which made up a set of gymbals far more elaborate than were ever used to suspend a mariner's compass aboard ship.

There were three rings, one inside the other. And two rings will take care of any motion in three dimensions. These rings were pivoted, too, so that an unbelievably intricate series of motions could be given to the solenoid within them all. But the device was broken, now. A pivot had given away, and shaft and socket alike had vanished. Tommy became absorbed. Some oddity bothered him....

He pieced the thing together mentally. And he exclaimed suddenly. There had been four rings of metal! One was gone! He comprehended, very suddenly. The third mirror in the dimensoscope was the one so strangely distorted by its position, which was at half of a right angle to all the dimensions of human experience. It was the third ring in the solenoid's supports which had vanished. And Tommy,

staring at the gigantic apparatus and summoning all his theoretic knowledge and all his brain to work, saw the connection between the two things.

“The time dimension and the world-line,” he said sharply, excited in spite of himself. “Revolving in the time dimension means telescoping in the world-line.... It would be a strain no matter could endure....”

The mirror in the dimensoscope was not pointing in a fourth dimension. It did not need to. It was reflecting light at a right angle, and hence needed to be only at half of a right angle to the two courses of the beam it reflected. But to whirl the steel globe into a fifth dimension, the solenoid’s support had for one instant to revolve in time! For the fraction of a second it would have literally to pass through its own substance. It would be required to undergo precisely the sort of strain involved in turning a hollow seamless metal globe, inside out! No metal could stand such a strain. No form of matter known to man could endure it.

“It would explode!” said Tommy excitedly to himself,

alone in the great bare laboratory. "Steel itself would vaporize! It would wreck the place!"

And then he looked blank. Because the place had very obviously not been wrecked. And yet a metal ring had vanished, leaving no trace....

Von Holtz came back. He looked frightened.

"A—a repairman, Herr Reames," he said, stammering, "is on the way. And—Herr Reames...."

Tommy barely heard him. For a moment, Tommy was all scientist, confronted with the inexplicable, yet groping with a blind certainty toward a conclusion he very vaguely foresaw. He waved his hand impatiently....

"The Herr Jacaro is on the way here," stammered Von Holtz.

Tommy blinked, remembering that Von Holtz had told him he could make a certain metal, the only metal which could be moved in the fourth dimension.

“Jacaro?” he said blankly.

“The—friend of the Herr Professor Denham. He advanced the money for the Herr Professor’s experiments.”

Tommy heard him with only half his brain, though that half instantly decided that Von Holtz was lying. The only Jacaro Tommy knew of was a prominent gangster from Chicago, who had recently cemented his position in Chicago’s underworld by engineering the amalgamation of two once-rival gangs. Tommy knew, in a vague fashion, that Von Holtz was frightened. That he was terrified in some way. And that he was inordinately suspicious of someone, and filled with a queer desperation.

“Well?” said Tommy abstractedly. The thought he needed was coming. A metal which would have full tensile strength up to a certain instant, and then disrupt itself without violence into a gas, a vapor.... It would be an alloy, perhaps. It would be....

He struck at his own head with his clenched fist,

angrily demanding that his brain bring forth the thought that was forming slowly. The metal that could be revolved in time without producing a disastrous explosion and without requiring an impossible amount of power....

He did not see Von Holtz looking in the eyepiece of the dimensoscope. He stared at nothing, thinking concentratedly, putting every bit of energy into sheer thought. And suddenly, like the explosion he sought a way to avoid, the answer came, blindingly clear.

He surveyed that answer warily. A tremendous excitement filled him.

"I've got it!" he said softly to himself. "By God, I know how he did the thing!"

And as if through a mist the figure of Von Holtz became clear before his eyes. Von Holtz was looking into the dimensoscope tube. He was staring into that other, extraordinary world in which Denham and his daughter were marooned. And Von Holtz's face was utterly, deathly white, and he was making frantic,

repressed gestures, and whispering little whimpering phrases to himself. They were unintelligible, but the deathly pallor of his cheeks, and the fascinated, dribbling fullness of his lips brought Tommy Reames suddenly down to earth.

“What’s happening?” demanded Tommy sharply.

Von Holtz did not answer. He made disjointed, moaning little exclamations to himself. He was twitching horribly as he looked through the telescope into that other world....

Tommy flung him aside and clapped his own eye to the eyepiece. And then he groaned.

The telescope was pointed at the steel globe upon that ferny bank, no more than a few hundred yards away but two dimensions removed from Earth. The screening mass of tree-fronds had been torn away. A swarm of ragged, half-naked men was gathered about the globe. They were armed with spears and clubs, in the main, but there were other weapons of intricate design whose uses Tommy could not even guess at.

He did not try. He was watching the men as they swarmed about and over the steel sphere. Their faces were brutal and savage, and now they were distorted with an insane hate. It was the same awful, gibbering hatred he had sensed in the caperings of the four he had seen bellowing vituperation at an airplane.

They were not savages. Somehow he could not envision them as primitive. Their features were hard-bitten, seamed with hatred and with vice unspeakable. And they were white. The instant impression any man would have received was that here were broken men; fugitives, bandits, assassins. Here were renegades or worse from some higher, civilized race.

They battered hysterically upon the steel globe. It was not the attack of savages upon a strange thing. It was the assault of desperate, broken men upon a thing they hated. A glass pane splintered and crashed. Spears were thrust into the opening, while mouths opened as if in screams of insane fury. And then, suddenly, the door of the globe flew wide.

The Ragged Men did not wait for anyone to come out. They fought each other to get into the opening, their eyes glaring madly, filled with the lust to kill.

Chapter 3

A battered and antiquated flivver came chugging down the wire-fenced lane to the laboratory, an hour later. It made a prodigious din, and Tommy Reames went out to meet it. He was still a little pale. He had watched the steel globe turned practically inside out by the Ragged Men. He had seen them bringing out cameras, cushions, and even the padding of the walls, to be torn to bits in a truly maniacal fury. But he had not seen one sign of a human being killed. Denham and his daughter had not been in the globe when it was found and ransacked. So far, then, they were probably safe. Tommy had seen them vanish into the tree-fern forest. They had been afraid, and with good reason. What dangers they might encounter in the fern forest he could not guess. How long they would escape the search of the Ragged Men, he could not know. How he could ever hope to find them if he succeeded in duplicating Denham's dimension-traveling apparatus he could not even think of, just now. But the Ragged Men were not searching the fern forest. So much was sure. They were encamped by

the steel sphere, and a scurvy-looking lot they were.

Coming out of the brick laboratory, Tommy saw a brawny figure getting out of the antiquated flivver whose arrival had been so thunderous. That brawny figure nodded to him and grinned. Tommy recognized him. The red-headed, broad-shouldered filling station attendant in the last village, who had given him specific directions for reaching this place.

“You hit that gate a lick, didn’t you?” asked the erstwhile filling station attendant amiably. “Mr. Von Holtz said you had a flat and a busted radiator. That right?”

Tommy nodded. The red-headed man walked around the car, scratched his chin, and drew out certain assorted tools. He put them on the grass with great precision, pumped a gasoline blow-torch to pressure and touched a match to its priming-basin, and while the gasoline flamed smokily he made a half dozen casual movements with a file, and the broken radiator tube was exposed for repair.

He went back to the torch and observed placidly:

“The Professor ain’t around, is he?”

Tommy shook his head.

“Thought not,” said the red-headed one. “He gen’rally comes out and talks a while. I helped him build some of them dinkuses in the barn yonder.”

Tommy said eagerly:

“Say, which of those things did you help him build? That big thing with the solenoid—the coil?”

“Yeah. How’d it work?” The red-headed one set a soldering iron in place and began to jack up the rear wheel to get at the tire. “Crazy idea, if you ask me. I told Miss Evelyn so. She laughed and said she’d be in the ball when it was tried. Did it work?”

“Too damn well,” said Tommy briefly. “I’ve got to repair that solenoid. How about a job helping?”

The red-headed man unfastened the lugs of the rim, kicked the tire speculatively, and said, "Gone to hell." He put on the spare tire with ease and dispatch.

"Um," he said. "How about that Mr. Von Holtz? Is he goin' to boss the job?"

"He is not," said Tommy, with a shade of grimness in his tone.

The red-headed man nodded and took the soldering iron in hand. He unwound a strip of wire solder, mended the radiator tube with placid ease, and seemed to bang the cooling-flanges with a total lack of care. They went magically back into place, and it took close inspection to see that the radiator had been damaged.

"She's all right," he observed. He regarded Tommy impersonally. "Suppose you tell me how come you horn in on this," he suggested, "an' maybe I'll play. That guy Von Holtz is a crook, if you ask me about him."

Tommy ran his hand across his forehead, and told him.

“Um,” said the red-headed man calmly. “I think I’ll go break Mr. Von Holtz’s neck. I got me a hunch.”

He took two deliberate steps forward. But Tommy said:

“I saw Denham not an hour ago. So far, he’s all right. How long he’ll be all right is a question. But I’m going after him.”

The red-headed man scrutinized him exhaustively.

“Um. I might try that myself. I kinda like the Professor. An’ Miss Evelyn. My name’s Smithers. Let’s go look through the dinkus the Professor made.”

They went together into the laboratory. Von Holtz was looking through the dimensoscope. He started back as they entered, and looked acutely uneasy when he saw the red-headed man.

“How do you do,” he said nervously. “They—the Ragged Men—have just brought in a dead man. But it is not the Herr Professor.”

Without a word, Tommy took the brass tube in his hand. Von Holtz moved away, biting his lips. Tommy stared into that strange other world.

The steel sphere lay as before, slightly askew upon a bank of glossy ferns. But its glass windows were shattered, and fragments of everything it had contained were scattered about. The Ragged Men had made a camp and built a fire. Some of them were roasting meat—the huge limb of a monstrous animal with a scaly, reptilian hide. Others were engaged in vehement argument over the body of one of their number, lying sprawled out upon the ground.

Tommy spoke without moving his eyes from the eyepiece.

“I saw Denham with a club just now. This man was killed by a club.”

The Ragged Men in the other world debated acrimoniously. One of them pointed to the dead man's belt, and spread out his hands. Something was missing from the body. Tommy saw, now, three or four other men with objects that looked rather like policemen's truncheons, save that they were made of glittering metal. They were plainly weapons. Denham, then, was armed—if he could understand how the weapon was used.

The Ragged Men debated, and presently their dispute attracted the attention of a man with a huge black beard. He rose from where he sat gnawing at a piece of meat and moved grandly toward the disputatious group. They parted at his approach, but a single member continued the debate against even the bearded giant. The bearded one plucked the glittering truncheon from his belt. The disputatious one gasped in fear and flung himself desperately forward. But the bearded man kept the truncheon pointed steadily.... The man who assailed him staggered, reached close enough to strike a single blow, and collapsed. The bearded man pointed the metal truncheon at him as

he lay upon the ground. He heaved convulsively, and was still.

The bearded man went back to his seat and picked up the gnawed bit of meat again. The dispute had ceased. The chattering group of men dispersed.

Tommy was about to leave the eyepiece of the instrument when a movement nearby caught his eye. A head peered cautiously toward the encampment. A second rose beside it. Denham and his daughter Evelyn. They were apparently no more than thirty feet from the dimensoscope. Tommy could see them talking cautiously, saw Denham lift and examine a metal truncheon like the bearded man's, and force his daughter to accept it. He clutched a club, himself, with a grim satisfaction.

Moments later they vanished quietly in the thick fern foliage, and though Tommy swung the dimensoscope around in every direction, he could see nothing of their retreat.

He rose from that instrument with something

approaching hopefulness. He'd seen Evelyn very near and very closely. She did not look happy, but she did look alert rather than worn. And Denham was displaying a form of competence in the face of danger which was really more than would have been expected in a Ph.D., a M.A., and other academic distinctions running to most of the letters of the alphabet.

"I've just seen Denham and Evelyn again," said Tommy crisply. "They're safe so far. And I've seen one of the weapons of the Ragged Men in use. If we can get a couple of automatics and some cartridges to Denham, he'll be safe until we can repair the big solenoid."

"There was the small catapult," said Von Holtz bitterly, "but it was dismantled. The Herr Professor saw me examining it, and he dismantled it. So that I did not learn how to calculate the way of changing the position—"

Tommy's eyes rested queerly on Von Holtz for a moment.

"You know how to make the metal required," he said suddenly. "You'd better get busy making it. Plenty of it. We'll need it."

Von Holtz stared at him, his weak eyes almost frightened.

"You *know*? You know how to combine the right angles?"

"I think so," said Tommy. "I've got to find out if I'm right. Will you make the metal?"

Von Holtz bit at his too-red lips.

"But Herr Reames!" he said stridently, "I wish to know the equation! Tell me the method of pointing a body in a fourth or a fifth direction. It is only fair—"

"Denham didn't tell you," said Tommy.

Von Holtz's arms jerked wildly.

"But I will not make the metal! I insist upon being told the equation! I insist upon it! I will not make the metal if you do not tell me!"

Smithers was in the laboratory, of course. He had been surveying the big solenoid-catapult and scratching his chin reflectively. Now he turned.

But Tommy took Von Holtz by the shoulders. And Tommy's hands were the firm and sinewy hands of a sportsman, if his brain did happen to be the brain of a scientist. Von Holtz writhed in his grip.

"There is only one substance which could be the metal I need, Von Holtz," he said gently. "Only one substance is nearly three-dimensional. Metallic ammonium! It's known to exist, because it makes a mercury amalgam, but nobody has been able to isolate it because nobody has been able to give it a fourth dimension—duration in time. Denham did it. You can do it. And I need it, and you'd better set to work at the job. You'll be very sorry if you don't, Von

Holtz!”

Smithers said with a vast calmness.

“I got me a hunch. So if y’want his neck broke....”

Tommy released Von Holtz and the lean young man gasped and sputtered and gesticulated wildly in a frenzy of rage.

“He’ll make it,” said Tommy coldly. “Because he doesn’t dare not to!”

Von Holtz went out of the laboratory, his weak-looking eyes staring and wild, and his mouth working.

“He’ll be back,” said Tommy briefly. “You’ve got to make a small model of that big catapult, Smithers. Can you do it?”

“Sure,” said Smithers. “The ring’ll be copper tubing, with pin-bearings. Wind a coil on the lathe. It’ll be kinda rough, but it’ll do. But gears, now....”

“I’ll attend to them. You know how to work that metallic ammonium?”

“If that’s what it was,” agreed Smithers. “I worked it for the Professor.”

Tommy leaned close and whispered:

“You never made any gears of that. But did you make some springs?”

“Uh-huh!”

Tommy grinned joyously.

“Then we’re set and I’m right! Von Holtz wants a mathematical formula, and no one on earth could write one, but we don’t need it!”

Smithers rummaged around the laboratory with a casual air, acquired this and that and the other thing, and set to work with an astounding absence of waste motions. From time to time he inspected the great catapult thoughtfully, verified some impression, and

went about the construction of another part.

And when Von Holtz did not return, Tommy hunted for him. He suddenly remembered hearing his car motor start. He found his car missing. He swore, then, and grimly began to hunt for a telephone in the house. But before he had raised central he heard the deep-toned purring of the motor again. His car was coming swiftly back to the house. And he saw, through a window, that Von Holtz was driving it.

The lean young man got out of it, his face white with passion. He started for the laboratory. Tommy intercepted him.

“I—went to get materials for making the metal,” said Von Holtz hoarsely, repressing his rage with a great effort. “I shall begin at once, Herr Reames.”

Tommy said nothing whatever. Von Holtz was lying. Of course. He carried nothing in the way of materials. But he had gone away from the house, and Tommy knew as definitely as if Von Holtz had told him, that Von Holtz had gone off to communicate in safety with

someone who signed his correspondence with a J.

Von Holtz went into the laboratory. The four-cylinder motor began to throb at once. The whine of the dynamo arose almost immediately after. Von Holtz came out of the laboratory and dived into a shed that adjoined the brick building. He remained in there.

Tommy looked at the trip register on his speedometer. Like most people with methodical minds, he had noted the reading on arriving at a new destination. Now he knew how far Von Holtz had gone. He had been to the village and back.

“Meaning,” said Tommy grimly to himself, “that the J who wants plans and calculations is either in the village or at the end of a long-distance wire. And Von Holtz said he was on the way. He’ll probably turn up and try to bribe me.”

He went back into the laboratory and put his eye to the eyepiece of the dimensoscope. Smithers had his blow-torch going and was busily accumulating an apparently unrelated series of discordant bits of

queerly-shaped metal. Tommy looked through at the strange mad world he could see through the eyepiece.

The tree-fern forest was still. The encampment of the Ragged Men was nearly quiet. Sunset seemed to be approaching in this other world, though it was still bright outside the laboratory. The hours of day and night were obviously not the same in the two worlds, so close together that a man could be flung from one to the other by a mechanical contrivance.

The sun seemed larger, too, than the orb which lights our normal earth. When Tommy swung the vision instrument about to search for it, he found a great red ball quite four times the diameter of our own sun, neatly bisected by the horizon. Tommy watched, waiting for it to sink. But it did not sink straight downward as the sun seems to do in all temperate latitudes. It descended, yes, but it moved along the horizon as it sank. Instead of a direct and forthright dip downward, the sun seemed to progress along the horizon, dipping more deeply as it swam. And Tommy watched it blankly.

“It’s not our sun.... But it’s not our world. Yet it revolves, and there are men on it. And a sun that size would bake the earth.... And it’s sinking at an angle that would only come at a latitude of—”

That was the clue. He understood at once. The instrument through which he regarded the strange world looked out upon the polar regions of that world. Here, where the sun descended slantwise, were the high latitudes, the coldest spaces upon all the whole planet. And if here there were the gigantic growths of a carboniferous era, the tropic regions of this planet must be literal infernos.

And then he saw in its gradual descent the monster sun was going along behind the golden city, and the outlines of its buildings, the magnificence of its spires, were limned clearly for him against the dully glowing disk.

Nowhere upon earth had such a city ever been dreamed of. No man had ever envisioned such a place, where far-flung arches interconnected soaring, towering columns, where curves of perfect grace

were united in forms of utterly perfect proportion....

The sunlight died, and dusk began and deepened, and vividly brilliant stars began to come out overhead, and Tommy suddenly searched the heavens eagerly for familiar constellations. And found not one. All the stars were strange. These stars seemed larger and much more near than the tiny pinpoints that blink down upon our earth.

And then he swung the instrument again and saw great fires roaring and the Ragged Men crouched about them. Within them, rather, because they had built fires about themselves as if to make a wall of flame. And once Tommy saw twin, monstrous eyes, gazing from the blackness of the tree-fern forest. They were huge eyes, and they were far apart, so that the head of the creature who used them must have been enormous. And they were all of fifteen feet above the ground when they speculatively looked over the ring of fires and the ragged, degraded men within them. Then that creature, whatever it was, turned

away and vanished.

But Tommy felt a curious shivering horror of the thing. It had moved soundlessly, without a doubt, because not one of the Ragged Men had noted its presence. It had been kept away by the fires. But Denham and Evelyn were somewhere in the tree-fern forest, and they would not dare to make fires....

Tommy drew away from the dimensoscope, shivering. He had been looking only, but the place into which he looked was real, and the dangers that lay hidden there were very genuine, and there was a man and a girl of his own race and time struggling desperately, without arms or hope, to survive.

Smithers was casually fitting together an intricate array of little rings made of copper tubing. There were three of them, and each was fitted into the next largest by pins which enabled them to spin noiselessly and swiftly at the touch of Smithers' finger. He had them spinning now, each in a separate direction, and the effect was bewildering.

As Tommy watched, Smithers stopped them, oiled the pins carefully, and painstakingly inserted a fourth ring. Only this ring was of a white metal that looked somehow more pallid than silver. It had a whiteness like that of ivory beneath its metallic gleam.

Tommy blinked.

“Did Von Holtz give you that metal?” he asked suddenly.

Smithers looked up and puffed at a short brown pipe.

“Nope. There was some splashes of it by the castin’ box. I melted ’em together an’ run a ring. Pressed it to shape; y’ can’t hammer this stuff. It goes to water and dries up quicker’n lightning—an’ you hold y’nose an’ run. I used it before for the Professor.”

Tommy went over to him excitedly. He picked up the little contrivance of many concentric rings. The big motor was throbbing rhythmically, and the generator was humming at the back of the laboratory. Von Holtz was out of sight.

With painstaking care Tommy went over the little device. He looked up.

“A coil?”

“I wound one,” said Smithers calmly. “On the lathe. Not so hot, but it’ll do, I guess. But I can’t fix these rings like the Professor did.”

“I think I can,” said Tommy crisply. “Did you make some wire for springs?”

“Yeah!”

Tommy fingered the wire. Stout, stiff, and surprisingly springy wire of the same peculiar metal. It was that metallic ammonium which chemists have deduced must exist because of the chemical behavior of the compound NH_3 , but which Denham alone had managed to procure. Tommy deduced that it was an allotropic modification of the substance which forms an amalgam with mercury, as metallic tin is an allotrope of the amorphous gray powder which is tin in its normal, stable state.

He set to work with feverish excitement. For one hour, for two he worked. At the end of that time he was explaining the matter curtly to Smithers, so intent on his work that he wholly failed to hear a motor car outside or to realize that it had also grown dark in this world of ours.

“You see, Smithers, if a two-dimensioned creature wanted to adjust two right angles at right angles to each other, he’d have them laid flat, of course. And if he put a spring at the far ends of those right angles—they’d look like a T, put together—so that the cross-bar of that T was under tension, he’d have the equivalent of what I’m doing. To make a three-dimensioned figure, that imaginary man would have to bend one side of the cross-bar up. As if the two ends of it were under tension by a spring, and the spring would only be relieved of tension when that cross-bar was bent. But the vertical would be his time dimension, so he’d have to have something thin, or it couldn’t be bent. He’d need something ‘thin in time.’

“We have the same problem. But metallic ammonium is ‘thin in time.’ It’s so fugitive a substance that

Denham is the only man ever to secure it. So we use these rings and adjust these springs to them so they're under tension which will only be released when they're all at right angles to each other. In our three dimensions that's impossible, but we have a metal that can revolve in a fourth, and we reinforce their tendency to adjust themselves by starting them off with a jerk. We've got 'em flat. They'll make a good stiff jerk when they try to adjust themselves. And the solenoid's a bit eccentric—"

"Shut up!" snapped Smithers suddenly.

He was facing the door, bristling. Von Holtz was in the act of coming in, with a beefy, broad-shouldered man with blue jowls. Tommy straightened up, thought swiftly, and then smiled grimly.

"Hullo, Von Holtz," he said pleasantly. "We've just completed a model catapult. We're all set to try it out. Watch!"

He set a little tin can beneath the peculiar device of copper-tubing rings. The can was wholly ordinary,

made of thin sheet-iron plated with tin as are all the tin cans of commerce.

“You have the catapult remade?” gasped Von Holtz.
“Wait! Wait! Let me look at it!”

For one instant, and one instant only, Tommy let him see. The massed set of concentric rings, each one of them parallel to all the others. It looked rather like a flat coil of tubing; certainly like no particularly obscure form of projector. But as Von Holtz’s weak eyes fastened avidly upon it, Tommy pressed the improvised electric switch. At once that would energize the solenoid and release all the tensed springs from their greater tension, for an attempt to reach a permanent equilibrium.

As Von Holtz and the blue-jowled man stared, the little tin can leaped upward into the tiny coil. The small copper rings twinkled one within the other as the springs operated. The tin can was wrenched this way and that, then for the fraction of a second hurt the eyes that gazed upon it—and it was gone! And then the little coil came spinning down to the work

bench top from its broken bearings and the remaining copper rings spun aimlessly for a moment. But the third ring of whitish metal had vanished utterly, and so had the coiled-wire springs which Von Holtz had been unable to distinguish. And there was an overpowering smell of ammonia in the room.

Von Holtz flung himself upon the still-moving little instrument. He inspected it savagely, desperately. His full red lips drew back in a snarl.

“How did you do it?” he cried shrilly. “You must tell me! I—I—I will kill you if you do not tell me!”

The blue-jowled man was watching Von Holtz. Now his lips twisted disgustedly. He turned to Tommy and narrowed his eyes.

“Look here,” he rumbled. “This fool’s no good! I want the secret of that trick you did. What’s your price?”

“I’m not for sale,” said Tommy, smiling faintly.

The blue-jowled man regarded him with level eyes.

“My name’s Jacaro,” he said after an instant. “Maybe you’ve heard of me. I’m from Chicago.”

Tommy smiled more widely.

“To be sure,” he admitted. “You were the man who introduced machine-guns into gang warfare, weren’t you? Your gunmen lined up half a dozen of the Buddy Haines gang against a wall and wiped them out, I believe. What do you want this secret for?”

The level eyes narrowed. They looked suddenly deadly.

“That’s my business,” said Jacaro briefly. “You know who I am. And I want that trick y’did. I got my own reasons. I’ll pay for it. Plenty. You know I got plenty to pay, too. Or else—”

“What?”

“Something’ll happen to you,” said Jacaro briefly. “I ain’t sayin” what. But it’s damn likely you’ll tell what I want to know before it’s finished. Name your price

and be damn quick!”

Tommy took his hand out of his pocket. He had a gun in it.

“The only possible answer to that,” he said suavely, “is to tell you to go to hell. Get out! But Von Holtz stays here. He’d better!”

Chapter 4

Within half an hour after Jacaro's leaving, Smithers was in the village, laying in a stock of supplies and sending telegrams that Tommy had written out for transmission. Tommy sat facing an ashen Von Holtz and told him pleasantly what would be done to him if he failed to make the metallic ammonium needed to repair the big solenoid. In an hour, Smithers was back, reporting that Jacaro was also sending telegrams but that he, Smithers, had stood over the telegraph operator until his own messages were transmitted. He brought back weapons, too—highly illegal things to have in New York State, where a citizen is only law-abiding when defenseless. And then four days of hectic, sleepless labor began.

On the first day one of Tommy's friends drove in in answer to a telegram. It was Peter Dalzell, with men in uniform apparently festooned about his car. He announced that a placard warning passersby of smallpox within, had been added to the decorative signs upon the gate, and stared incredulously at the interior of the big brick barn. Tommy grinned at him

and gave him plans and specifications of a light steel globe in which two men might be transported into the fifth dimension by a suitably operating device. Tommy had sat up all night drawing those plans. He told Dalzell just enough of what he was up against to enlist Dalzell's enthusiastic cooperation without permitting him to doubt Tommy's sanity. Dalzell had known Tommy as an amateur tennis player, but not as a scientist.

He marveled, refused to believe his eyes when he looked through the dimensoscope, and agreed that the whole thing had to be kept secret or the rescue expedition would be prevented from starting by the incarceration of both Tommy and Smithers in comfortable insane asylums. He feigned to admire Von Holtz, deathly white and nearly frantic with a corroding rage, and complimented Tommy on his taste for illegality. He even asked Von Holtz if he wanted to leave, and Von Holtz snarled insults at him. Von Holtz was beginning to work at the manufacture of metallic ammonium.

It was an electrolytic process, of course. Ordinarily, when—say—ammonium chloride is broken down by an electric current, ammonium is deposited at the cathode and instantly becomes a gas which dissolves in the water or bubbles up to the surface. With a mercury cathode, it is dissolved and becomes a metallic amalgam, which also breaks down into gas with much bubbling of the mercury. But Denham had worked out a way of delaying the breaking-down, which left him with a curiously white, spongy mass of metal which could be carefully melted down and cast, but not under any circumstances violently struck or strained.

Von Holtz was working at that. On the second day he delivered, snarling, a small ingot of the white metal. He was imprisoned in the lean-to-shed in which the electrolysis went on. But Tommy had more than a suspicion that he was in communication with Jacaro.

“Of course,” he said drily to Smithers, who had expressed his doubts. “Jacaro had somebody sneak up and talk to him through the walls, or maybe through a bored hole. While there’s a hope of finding out what

he wants to know through Von Holtz, Jacaro won't try anything. Not anything rough, anyhow. We mustn't be bumped off while what we are doing is in our heads alone. We're safe enough—for a while."

Smithers grumbled.

"We need that ammonium," said Tommy, "and I don't know how to make it. I bluffed that I could, and in time I might, but it would need time and meanwhile Denham needs us. Dalzell is going to send a plane over today, with word of when we can expect our own globe. We'll try to have the big catapult ready when it comes. And the plane will drop some extra supplies. I've ordered a sub-machine gun. Handy when we get over there in the tree-fern forests. Right now, though, we need to be watching...."

Because they were taking turns looking through the dimensoscope. For signs of Denham and Evelyn. And Tommy was finding himself thinking wholly unscientific thoughts about Evelyn, since a pretty girl in difficulties is of all possible things the one most likely to make a man romantic.

In the four days of their hardest working, he saw her three times. The globe was wrecked and ruined. Its glass was broken out and its interior ripped apart. It had been pillaged so exhaustively that there was no hope that whatever device had been included in its design, for its return, remained even repairably intact. That device had not worked, to be sure, but Tommy puzzled sometimes over the fact that he had seen no mechanical device of any sort in the plunder that had been brought out to be demolished. But he did not think of those things when he saw Evelyn.

The Ragged Men's encampment was gone, but she and her father lingered furtively, still near the pillaged globe. The first day Tommy saw her, she was still blooming and alert. The second day she was paler. Her clothing was ripped and torn, as if by thorns. Denham had a great raw wound upon his forehead, and his coat was gone and half his shirt was in ribbons. Before Tommy's eyes they killed a nameless small animal with the trunchionlike weapon Evelyn carried. And Denham carted it triumphantly off into the shelter of the tree-fern forest. But to

Tommy that shelter began to appear extremely dubious.

That same afternoon some of the Ragged Men came suspiciously to the globe and inspected it, and then vented a gibbering rage upon it with blows and curses. They seemed half-mad, these men. But then, all the Ragged Men seemed a shade less than sane. Their hatred for the Golden City seemed the dominant emotion of their existence.

And when they had gone, Tommy saw Denham peering cautiously from behind a screening mass of fern. And Denham looked sick at heart. His eyes lifted suddenly to the heavens, and he stared off into the distance again, and then he regarded the heavens again with an expression that was at once of the utmost wistfulness and the uttermost of despair.

Tommy swung the dimensoscope about and searched the skies of that other world. He saw the flying machine, and it was a swallow-winged device that moved swiftly, and now soared and swooped in abrupt short circles almost overhead. Tommy could see its

pilot, leaning out to gaze downward. He was no more than a hundred feet up, almost at the height of the tree-fern tops. And the pilot was moving too swiftly for Tommy to be able to focus accurately upon his face, but he could see him as a man, an indubitable man in no fashion distinguishable from the other men of this earth. He was scrutinizing the globe as well as he could without alighting.

He soared upward, suddenly, and his plane dwindled as it went toward the Golden City.

And then, inevitably, Tommy searched for the four Ragged Men who had inspected the globe a little while since. He saw them, capering horribly behind a screening of verdure. They did not shake their clenched fists at the flying machine. Instead, they seemed filled with a ghastly mirth. And suddenly they began to run frantically for the far distance, as if bearing news of infinite importance.

And when he looked back at Denham, it seemed to Tommy that he wrung his hands before he disappeared.

But that was the second day of the work upon our own world, and just before sunset there was a droning in the earthly sky above the laboratory, and Tommy ran out, and somebody shot at him from a patch of woodland a quarter of a mile away from the brick building. Isolated as Denham's place was, the shot would go unnoticed. The bullet passed within a few feet of Tommy, but he paid no attention. It was one of Jacaro's watchers, no doubt, but Jacaro did not want Tommy killed. So Tommy waited until the plane swooped low—almost to the level of the laboratory roof—and a thickly padded package thudded to the ground. He picked it up and darted back into the laboratory as other bullets came from the patch of woodland.

“Funny,” he said dryly to Smithers, inside the laboratory again; “they don't dare kill me—yet—and Von Holtz doesn't dare leave or refuse to do what I tell him to do; and yet they expect to lick us.”

Smithers growled. Tommy was unpacking the wrapped package. A grim, blued-steel thing came out of much padding. Boxes tumbled after it.

“Sub-machine gun,” said Tommy, “and ammunition. Jacaro and his little pals will try to get in here when they think we’ve got the big solenoid ready for use. They’ll try to get it before we can use it. This will attend to them.”

“An’ get us in jail,” said Smithers calmly, “for forty-’leven years.”

“No,” said Tommy, and grinned. “We’ll be in the fifth dimension. Our job is to fling through the catapult all the stuff we’ll need to make another catapult to fling us back again.”

“It can’t be done,” said Smithers flatly.

“Maybe not,” agreed Tommy, “especially since we ruin all our springs and one gymbal ring every time we use the thing. But I’ve got an idea. I’ll want five coils with hollow iron cores, and the whole works shaped like this, with two holes bored so....”

He sketched. He had been working on the idea for several days, and the sketch was ready in his mind to

be transferred to paper.

“What you goin’ to do?”

“Something crazy,” said Tommy. “A mirror isn’t the only thing that changes angles to right ones.”

“You’re the doctor,” said the imperturbable Smithers.

He set to work. He puzzled Tommy sometimes, Smithers did. So far he hadn’t asked how much his pay was going to be. He’d worked unintermittantly. He had displayed a colossal, a tremendous calmness. But no man could work as hard as Smithers did without some powerful driving-force. It was on the fourth day that Tommy learned what it was.

The five coils had been made, and Tommy was assembling them with an extraordinary painstaking care behind a screen, to hide what he was doing. He’d discovered a peep-hole bored through the brick wall from the lean-to where Von Holtz worked. He was no longer locked in there. Tommy abandoned the pretense of imprisonment after finding an automatic

pistol and a duplicate key to the lock in Von Holtz's possession. He'd had neither when he was theoretically locked up, and Tommy laughed.

"It's a farce, Von Holtz," he said dryly, "this pretending you'll run away. You're here spying now, for Jacaro. Of course. And you don't dare harm either of us until you find out from me what you can't work out for yourself, and know I have done. How much is Jacaro going to pay you for the secret of the catapult, Von Holtz?"

Von Holtz snarled. Smithers moved toward him, his hands closing and unclosing. Von Holtz went gray with terror.

"Talk!" said Smithers.

"A—a million dollars," said Von Holtz, cringing away from the brawny red-headed man.

"It would be interesting to know what use it would be to him," said Tommy dryly. "But to earn that million you have to learn what we know. And to learn that,

you have to help us do it again, on the scale we want. You won't run away. So I shan't bother to lock you up hereafter. Jacaro's men come and talk to you at night, don't they?"

Von Holtz cringed again. It was an admission.

"I don't want to have to kill any of them," said Tommy pleasantly, "and we'll all be classed as mad if this thing gets out. So you go and talk to them in the lane when you want to, Von Holtz. But if any of them come near the laboratory, Smithers and I will kill them, and if Smithers is hurt I'll kill you; and I don't imagine Jacaro wants that, because he expects you to build another catapult for him. But I warn you, if I find another gun on you I'll thrash you."

Von Holtz's pallor changed subtly from the pallor of fear to the awful lividness of rage.

"You—Gott! You dare threaten—" He choked upon his own fury.

"I do," said Tommy. "And I'll carry out the threat."

Smithers moved forward once more.

“Mr. Von Holtz,” he said in a very terrible steadiness, “I aim to kill you some time. I ain’t done it yet because Mr. Reames says he needs you a while. But I know you got Miss Evelyn marooned off in them fern-woods on purpose! And—God knows she wouldn’t ever look at me, but—I aim to kill you some time!”

His eyes were flames. His hands closed and unclosed horribly. Von Holtz gaped at him, shocked out of his fury into fear again. He went unsteadily back to his lean-to. And Smithers went back to the dimensoscope. It was his turn to watch that other world for signs of Denham and Evelyn, and for any sign of danger to them.

Tommy adjusted the screen before the bench on which he was working, so Von Holtz could not see his task, and went back to work. It was a rather intricate task he had undertaken, and before the events of the past few days he would have said it was insane. But now he was taking it quite casually.

Presently he said:

“Smithers.”

Smithers did not look away from the brass tube.

“Yeah?”

“You’re thinking more about Miss Denham than her father.”

Smithers did not reply for a moment. Then he said:

“Well? What if I am?”

“I am, too,” said Tommy quietly. “I’ve never spoken to her, and I daresay she’s never even heard of me, and she certainly has never seen me, but—”

Smithers said with a vast calmness:

“She’ll never look at me, Mr. Reames. I know it. She talks to me, an’ laughs with me, but she’s never sure-’nough looked at me. An’ she never will. But I got the right to love her.”

Tommy nodded very gravely.

“Yes. You have. So have I. And so, when that globe comes, we both get into it with what arms and ammunition we can pack in, and go where she is, to help her. I intended to have you work the switch and send me off. But you can come, too.”

Smithers was silent. But he took his eyes from the dimensoscope eye-piece and regarded Tommy soberly. Then he nodded and turned back. And it was a compact between the two men that they should serve Evelyn, without any rivalry at all.

Tommy went on with his work. The essential defect in the catapult Denham had designed was the fact that it practically had to be rebuilt after each use. And, moreover, the metallic ammonium was so fugitive a substance that it was hard to keep. Once it had been strained by working, it gradually adverted to a gaseous state and was lost. And while he still tried to keep the little catapult in a condition for use, he was at no time sure that he could send a pair of automatics and ammunition through in a steel box at

any moment that Denham came close enough to notice a burning smoke-fuse attached.

But he was working on another form of catapult entirely, now. In this case he was using hollow magnets placed at known angles to each other. And they were so designed that each one tended to adjust its own hollow bore at right angles to the preceding one, and each one would take any moving, magnetic object and swing it through four successive right angles into the fifth dimension.

He fitted the first magnet on twin rods of malleable copper, which also would carry the current which energized the coil. He threaded the second upon the same twin supports. When the current was passed through the two of them, the magnetic field itself twisted the magnets, bending the copper supports and placing the magnets in their proper relative positions. A third magnet on the same pair of rods, and a repetition of the experiment, proved the accuracy of the idea. And since this device, like the dimensoscope, required only a forty-five degree angle to our known dimensions, instead of a right angle as

the other catapult did, Tommy was able to work with ordinary and durable materials. He fitted on the last two coils and turned on the current for his final experiment. And as he watched, the twin three-eighths-inch rods twisted and writhed in the grip of the intangible magnetic force. They bent, and quivered, and twisted.... And suddenly there seemed to be a sort of inaudible *snap*, and one of the magnets hurt the eyes that looked at it, and only the edge of the last of the series was visible.

Tommy drew in his breath sharply. "Now we try it," he said tensely. "I was trying to work this as the mirrors of the dimensoscope were fitted. Let's see."

He took a long piece of soft-iron wire and fed it into the hollow of the first magnet. He saw it come out and bend stiffly to enter the hollow of the second. It required force to thrust it through. It went still more stiffly into the third magnet. It required nearly all his strength to thrust it on, and on.... The end of it vanished. He pushed two feet or more of it beyond the last place where it was visible. It went into the magnet that hurt one's eyes. After that it could not be

seen.

Tommy's voice was strained.

"Swing the dimensoscope, Smithers," he ordered.

"See if you can see the wire. The end of it should be in the other world."

It seemed an age, an aeon, that Smithers searched. Then:

"Move it," he said.

Tommy obeyed.

"It's there," said Smithers evenly. "Two or three feet of it."

Tommy drew a deep, swift breath of relief.

"All right!" he said crisply. "Now we can fling anything we need through there, when our globe arrives. We can built up a dump of supplies, all sent through just before we slide through in the globe."

“Yeah,” said Smithers. “Uh—Mr. Reames. There’s a bunch of Ragged Men in sight, hauling something heavy behind them. I don’t know what it’s all about.”

Tommy went to the brass tube and stared through it. The tree-fern forest, drawing away in the distance. The vast and steaming morass. The glittering city, far, far in the distance.

And then a mob of the Ragged Men, hauling at some heavy thing. They were a long way off. Some of them came capering on ahead, and Tommy swung the dimensoscope about to see Denham and Evelyn dart for cover and vanish amid the tree-ferns. Denham was as ragged as the Ragged Men, by now, and Evelyn’s case was little better.

Frightened for them, Tommy swung the instrument about again. But they had not been seen. The leaders who ran gleefully on ahead were merely in haste. And they were followed more slowly by burly men and lean ones, whole men and limping men, who hauled frantically on long ropes of hide, dragging some heavy thing behind them. Tommy saw it only indistinctly as

the filthy, nearly naked bodies moved. But it was an intricate device of a golden-colored metal, and it rested upon the crudest of possible carts. The wheels were sections of tree trunks, pierced for wooden axles. The cart itself was made of the most roughly-hewed of timbers. And there were fifty or more of the Ragged Men who dragged it.

The men in advance now attacked the underbrush at the edge of the forest. They worked with a maniacal energy, clearing away the long fern-fronds while they capered and danced and babbled excitedly.

Irrelevantly, Tommy thought of escaped galley slaves. Just such hard-bitten, vice-ridden men as these, and filled with just such a mad, gibbering hatred of the free men they had escaped from. Certainly these men had been civilized once. As the golden-metal device came nearer, its intricacy was the more apparent. No savages could utilize a device like this one. And there was a queer deadliness in the very grace of its outlines. It was a weapon of some sort, but whose nature Tommy could not even guess.

And then he caught the gleam of metal also in the fern-forest. On the ground. In glimpses and in fragments of glimpses between the swarming naked bodies of the Ragged Men, he pieced together a wholly incredible impression. There was a roadway skirting the edge of the forest. It was not wide; not more than fifteen feet at most. But it was a solid road-bed of metal! The dull silver-white of aluminum gleamed from the ground. Two or more inches thick and fifteen feet wide, there was a seamless ribbon of aluminum that vanished behind the tree-ferns on either side.

The intricate device of golden metal was set up, now, and a shaggy, savage-seeming man mounted beside it grinning. He manipulated its levers and wheels with an expert's assurance. And Tommy saw repairs upon it. Crude repairs, with crude materials, but expertly done. Done by the Ragged Men, past doubt, and so demolishing any idea that they came of a savage race.

"Watch here, Smithers," said Tommy grimly.

He sat to work upon the little catapult after Denham's

design. His own had seemed to work, but the other was more sure. This would be an ambush the Ragged Men were preparing, and of course they would be preparing it for men of the Golden City. The plane had sighted Denham's steel globe. It had hovered overhead, and carried news of what it had seen to the Golden City. And here was a roadway that must have been made by the folk of the Golden City at some time or another. Its existence explained why Denham remained nearby. He had been hoping that some vehicle would travel along its length, containing civilized people to whom he could signal and ultimately explain his plight. And, being near the steel globe, his narrative would have its proofs at hand.

And now it was clear that the Ragged Men expected some ground-vehicle, too. They were preparing for it. They were setting a splendid ambush, with a highly-treasured weapon they ordinarily kept hidden. Their triumphant hatred could apply to nothing else than an expectation of inflicting injury on men of the Golden City.

So Tommy worked swiftly upon the catapult. A new

little ring of metallic ammonium was ready, and so were the necessary springs. The Ragged Men would lay their ambush. The men of the Golden City might enter it. They might. But the aviator who had spotted the globe would have seen the shredded contents of the sphere about. He would have known the Ragged Men had found it. And the men who came in a ground-vehicle from the Golden City should be expecting just such an ambush as was being laid.

There would be a fight, and Tommy, somehow, had no doubt that the men of the Golden City would win. And when they had cleared the field he would fling a smoking missile through the catapult. The victors should see it and should examine it. And though writing would serve little purpose, they should at least recognize it as written communication in a language other than their own. And mathematical diagrams would certainly be lucid, and proof of a civilized man sending the missile, and photographs....

The catapult was ready, and Tommy prepared his message-carrying projectile. He found snapshots and included them. He tore out a photograph of Evelyn

and her father, which had been framed above a work bench in the laboratory. He labored, racking his brain for a means of conveying the information that the globe was of any other world.... And suddenly he had an idea. A cord attached to his missile would lead to nothingness from either world, yet one end would be in that other world, and the other end in this. A wire would be better. Tugs upon it would convey the idea of living beings nearby but invisible. The photograph would identify Denham and his daughter as associated with the phenomenon and competent to explain it....

Tommy worked frantically to get the thing ready. He almost prayed that the men of the Golden City would be victors, would find his little missile when the fray was over, and would try to comprehend it....

All he could do was try.

Then Smithers said, from the dimensoscope:

“They’re all set, Mr. Reames. Y’better look.”

Tommy stared through the eye-piece. Strangely, the golden weapon had vanished. All seemed to be exactly as before. The cleared-away underbrush was replaced. Nothing was in any way changed from the normal in that space upon a mad world. But there was a tiny movement and Tommy saw a Ragged Man. He was lying prone upon the earth. He seemed either to hear or see something, because his lips moved as he spoke to another invisible man beside him, and his expression of malevolent joy was horrible.

Tommy swung the tube about. Nothing.... But suddenly he saw swiftly-moving winkings of sunlight from the edge of the tree-fern forest. Something was moving in there, moving with lightning swiftness along the fifteen-foot roadway of solid aluminum. It drew nearer, and more near....

The carefully camouflaged ambushade was fully focussed and Tommy was watching tensely when the thing happened.

He saw glitterings through the tree-fronds come to a smoothly decelerated stop. There was a pause; and

suddenly the underbrush fell flat. As if a single hand had smitten it, it wavered, drooped, and lay prone. The golden weapon was exposed, with its brawny and horribly grinning attendant. For one-half a split second Tommy saw the wheeled thing in which half a dozen men of the Golden City were riding. It was graceful and stream-lined and glittering. There was a platform on which the steel sphere would have been mounted for carrying away.

But then there was a sudden intolerable light as the men of the Golden City reached swiftly for peculiar weapons beside them. The light came from the crudely mounted weapon of the Ragged Men, and it was an unbearable actinic glare. For half a second, perhaps, it persisted, and died away to a red flame which leaped upward and was not.

Then the vehicle from the Golden City was a smoking, twisted ruin. Four of the six men in it were blasted, blackened crisps. Another staggered to his feet, struggled to reach a weapon and could not lift it, and twitched a dagger from his belt and fell forward; and Tommy could see that his suicide was deliberate.

The last man, alone, was comparatively unharmed by the blast of light. He swept a pistol-like contrivance into sight. It bore swiftly upon the now surging, yelling horde of Ragged Men. And one—two—three of them seemed to scream convulsively before they were trampled under by the rest.

But suddenly there were a myriad little specks of red all over the body of the man at bay. The pistol-like thing dropped from his grasp as his whole hand became encrimsoned. And then he was buried beneath the hating, blood-lusting mob of the forest men.

Chapter 5

An hour later, Tommy took his eyes away from the dimensoscope eye-piece. He could not bear to look any longer.

“Why don’t they kill him?” he demanded sickly, filled with a horrible, a monstrous rage. “Oh, why don’t they kill him?”

He felt maddeningly impotent. In another world entirely, a mob of half-naked renegades had made a prisoner. He was not dead, that solely surviving man from the Golden City. He was bound, and the Ragged Men guarded him closely, and his guards were diverting themselves unspeakably by small tortures, minor tortures, horribly painful but not weakening. And they capered and howled with glee when the bound man writhed.

The prisoner was a brave man, though. Helpless as he was, he presently flung back his head and set his teeth. Sweat stood out in great droplets upon his body and upon his forehead. And he stilled his writhings,

and looked at his captors with a grim and desperate defiance.

The guards made gestures which were all too clear, all too luridly descriptive of the manner of death which awaited him. And the man of the Golden City was ashen and hopeless and utterly despairing—and yet defiant.

Smithers took Tommy's place at the eye-piece of the instrument. His nostrils quivered at what he saw. The vehicle from the Golden City was being plundered, of course. Weapons from the dead men were being squabbled over, even fought over. And the Ragged Men fought as madly among themselves as if in combat with their enemies. The big golden weapon on its cart was already being dragged away to its former hiding-place. And somehow, it was clear that those who dragged it away expected and demanded that the solitary prisoner not be killed until their return.

It was that prisoner, in the agony which was only the beginning of his death, who made Smithers' teeth set tightly.

“I don’t see the Professor or Miss Evelyn,” said Smithers in a vast calmness. “I hope to Gawd they—don’t see this.”

Tommy swung on his heel, staring and ashen.

“They were near,” he said stridently. “I saw them! They saw what happened in the ambush! They’ll—they’ll see that man tortured!”

Smithers’ hand closed and unclosed.

“Maybe the Professor’ll have sense enough to take Miss Evelyn—uh—where she—can’t hear,” he said slowly, his voice level. “I hope so.”

Tommy flung out his hands desperately.

“I want to help that man!” he cried savagely. “I want to do something! I saw what they promised to do to him. I want to—to kill him, even! It would be mercy!”

Smithers said, with a queer, stilly shock in his voice:

“I see the Professor now. He’s got that gun-thing in his hand.... Miss Evelyn’s urging him to try to do something.... He’s looking at the sky.... It’ll be a long time before it’s dark.... He’s gone back out of sight....”

“If we had some dynamite!” said Tommy desperately, “we could take a chance on blowing ourselves to bits and try to fling it through and into the middle of those devils....”

He was pacing up and down the laboratory, harrowed by the fate of that gray-faced man who awaited death by torture; filled with a wild terror that Evelyn and her father would try to rescue him and be caught to share his fate; racked by his utter impotence to do more than watch....

Then Smithers said thickly:

“God!”

He stumbled away from the eye-piece. Tommy took his place, dry-throated with terror. He saw the

Ragged Men laughing uproariously. The bearded man who was their leader was breaking the arms and legs of the prisoner so that he would be helpless when released from the stake to which he was bound. And if ever human beings looked like devils out of hell, it was at that moment. The method of breaking the bones was excruciating. The prisoner screamed. The Ragged Men rolled upon the ground in their maniacal mirth.

And then a man dropped, heaving convulsively, and then another, and still another.... The grim, gaunt figure of Denham came out of the tree-fern forest, the queer small golden-metal trunchion in his hand. A fourth man dropped before the Ragged Men quite realized what had happened. The fourth man himself was armed—and a flashing slender body came plunging from the forest and Evelyn flung herself upon the still-heaving body and plucked away that weapon.

Tommy groaned, in the laboratory in another world. He could not look away, and yet it seemed that the heart would be torn from his body by that sight.

Because the Ragged Men had turned upon Denham with a concentrated ferocity, somehow knowing instantly that he was more nearly akin to the men of the Golden City than to them. But at sight of Evelyn, her garments rent by the thorns of the forest, her white body gleaming through the largest tears, they seemed to go mad. And Tommy's eyes, glazing, saw the look on Denham's face as he realized that Evelyn had not fled, but had followed him in his desperate and wholly hopeless effort.

Then the swarming mass of Ragged Men surged over the two of them. Buried them under reaching, hating, lusty fiends who fought even among themselves to be first to seize them.

Then there was only madness, and Denham was bound beside the man of the Golden City, and Evelyn was the center of a fighting group which was suddenly flung aside by the bearded giant, and the encampment of the Ragged Men was bedlam. And somehow Tommy knew with a terrible clarity that a man of the Golden City to torture was bliss unimaginable to these half-mad enemies of that city.

But a woman—

He turned from the instrument, three-quarters out of his head. He literally did not see Von Holtz gazing furtively in the doorway. His eyes were fixed and staring. It seemed that his brain would burst.

Then he heard his own voice saying with an altogether unbelievable steadiness:

“Smithers! They’ve got Evelyn. Get the sub-machine gun.”

Smithers cried out hoarsely. His face was not quite human, for an instant. But Tommy was bringing the work bench on which he had installed his magnetic catapult, close over by the dimensoscope.

“This cannot work,” he said in the same incredible calmness. “Not possibly. It should not work. It will not work. But it has to work!”

He was clamping the catapult to a piece of heavy timber.

“Put the gun so it shoots into the first magnet,” he said steadily. “The magnet-windings shouldn’t stand the current we’ve got to put into them. They’ve got to.”

Smithers’ fingers were trembling and unsteady. Tommy helped him, not looking through the dimensoscope at all.

“Start the dynamo,” he said evenly—and marveled foolishly at the voice that did not seem to belong to him at all, talking so steadily and so quietly. “Give me all the juice you’ve got. We’ll cut out this rheostat.”

He was tightening a vise which would hold the deadly little weapon in place while Smithers got the crude-oil engine going and accelerated it recklessly to its highest speed. Tommy flung the switch. Rubber insulation steamed and stank. He pulled the trigger of the little gun for a single shot. The bullet flew into the first hollow magnet, just as he had beforehand thrust an iron wire. It vanished. The series of magnets seemed unharmed.

With a peculiar, dreamlike steadiness, Tommy put his hand where an undeflected bullet would go through it. He pressed the trigger again. He felt a tiny breeze upon his hand. But the bullet had been unable to elude the compound-wound magnets, each of which now had quite four times the designed voltage impressed upon its coils.

Tommy flung off the switch.

“Work the gun,” he ordered harshly. “When I say fire, send a burst of shots through it. Keep the switch off except when you’re actually firing, so—God willing—the coils don’t burn out. Fire!”

He was gazing through the dimensoscope. Evelyn was struggling helplessly while two Ragged Men held her arms, grinning as only devils could have grinned, and others squabbled and watched with a fascinated attention some cryptic process which could only be the drawing of lots....

Tommy saw, and paid no attention. The machine-gun beside him rasped suddenly. He saw a tree-fern frond

shudder. He saw a gaping, irregular hole where a fresh frond was uncurling. Tommy put out his hand to the gun.

“Let me move it, bench and all,” he said steadily.

“Now try it again. Just a burst.”

Again the gun rasped. And the earth was kicked up suddenly where the bullets struck in that other world. The little steel-jacketed missiles were deflected by the terribly overstrained magnets of the catapult, but their energy was not destroyed. It was merely altered in direction. Fired within the laboratory upon our own and normal world, the bullets came out into the world of tree-ferns and monstrous things. They came out, as it happened, sideways instead of point first, which was due to some queer effect of dimension change upon an object moving at high velocity. Because of that, they ricocheted much more readily, and where they struck they made a much more ghastly wound. But the first two bursts caused no effect at all. They were not even noticed by the Ragged Men. The noise of the little gun was thunderous and snarling in the laboratory, but in the world of the fifth dimension

there was no sound at all.

“Like this,” said Tommy steadily. “Just like this.... Now fire!”

He had tilted the muzzle upward. And then with a horrible grim intensity he traversed the gun as it roared.

And it was butchery. Three Ragged Men were cut literally to bits before the storm of bullets began to do real damage. The squabbling group, casting lots for Evelyn, had a swathe of dead men in its midst before snarls begun had been completed.

“Again,” said Tommy coldly. “Again, Smithers, again!”

And again the little gun roared. The burly bearded man clutched at his throat—and it was a gory horror. A Thing began to run insanely. It did not even look human any longer. It stumbled over the leader of the Ragged Men and died as he had done. The bullets came tumbling over themselves erratically. They swooped and curved and dispersed themselves

crazily. Spinning as they were, at right angles to their line of flight, their trajectories were incalculable and their impacts were grisly.

The little gun fired ten several bursts, aimed in a desperate cold-bloodedness, before the smell of burnt rubber became suddenly overpowering and the rasping sound of an electric arc broke through the rumbling of the crude-oil engine in the back.

Smithers sobbed.

“Burnt out!”

But Tommy waved his hand.

“I think,” he said savagely, “that maybe a dozen of them got away. Evelyn’s staggering toward her father. She’ll turn him loose. That prisoner’s dead, though. Didn’t mean to shoot him, but those bullets flew wild.”

He gave Smithers the eye-piece. Sweat was rolling down his forehead in great drops. His hands were

trembling uncontrollably.

He paced shakenly up and down the laboratory, trying to shut out of his own sight the things he had seen when the bullets of his own aiming literally splashed into the living flesh of men. He had seen Ragged Men disemboweled by those spinning, knifelike projectiles. He had turned a part of the mad world of that other dimension into a shambles, and he did not regret it because he had saved Evelyn, but he wanted to shut out the horror of seeing what he had done.

“But now,” he said uncertainly to himself, “they’re no better off, except they’ve got weapons.... If that man from the Golden City hadn’t been killed....”

He was looking at the magnetic catapult, burned out and useless. His eyes swung suddenly to the other one. Just a little while since he had made ready a missile to be thrown through into the other world by that. It contained snapshots, and diagrams, and it was an attempt to communicate with the men of the Golden City without any knowledge of their language.

“But—I can communicate with Denham!”

He began to write feverishly. If he had looked out of the laboratory window, he would have seen Von Holtz running like a deer, waving his arms jerkily, and—when out of earshot of the laboratory—shouting loudly. And Von Holtz was carrying a small black box which Tommy would have identified instantly as a motion picture camera, built for amateurs but capable of taking pictures indoors and with a surprisingly small amount of light. And if Tommy had listened, he might possibly have heard the beginnings of those shoutings to men hidden in a patch of woodland about a quarter of a mile away. The men, of course, were Jacaro’s, waiting until either Von Holtz had secured the information that was wanted, or until an assault in force upon the laboratory would net them a catapult ready for use—to be examined, photographed, and duplicated at leisure.

But Tommy neither looked nor listened. He wrote feverishly, saying to Smithers at the dimensoscope:

“Denham’ll be looking around to see what killed those

men. When he does, we want to be ready to shoot a smoke-bomb through to him, with a message attached.”

Smithers made a gesture of no especial meaning save that he had heard. And Tommy went on writing swiftly, saying who he was and what he had done, and that another globe was being built so that he and Smithers could come with supplies and arms to help....

“He’s lookin’ around now, Mr. Reames,” said Smithers quietly. “He’s picked up a ricocheted bullet an’ is staring at it.”

The crude-oil engine was running at a thunderous rate. Tommy fastened his note in the little missile he had made ready. He placed it under the solenoid of the catapult after Denham’s design, with the springs and rings of metallic ammonium. He turned to Smithers.

“I’ll watch for him,” said Tommy unsteadily. “You know, watch for the right moment to fling it through.

Slow up the generator a little. It'll rack itself to pieces."

He put his eye to the eye-piece. He winced as he saw again what the bullets of his aiming had done. But he saw Denham almost at once. And Denham was scratched and bruised and looked very far indeed from the ideal of a professor of theoretic physics, with hardly more than a few shreds of clothing left upon him, and a ten-day's beard upon his face. He limped as he walked. But he had stopped in the task of gathering up weapons to show Evelyn excitedly what it was that he had found. A spent and battered bullet, but indubitably a bullet from the world of his own ken. He began to stare about him, hopeful yet incredulous.

Tommy took his eye from the dimensoscope just long enough to light the fuse of the smoke-bomb.

"Here it goes, Smithers!"

He flung the switch. The missile with its thickly smoking fuse leaped upward as the concentric rings

flickered and whirled bewilderingly. The missile hurt the eyes that watched it. It vanished. The solenoid dropped to the floor from the broken small contrivance.

Then Tommy's heart stood still as he gazed through the eye-piece again. He could see nothing but an opaque milkiness. But it drifted away, and he realised that it was smoke. More, Denham was staring at it. More yet, he was moving cautiously towards its source, one of the strange golden weapons held ready....

Denham was investigating.

The generator at the back of the laboratory slowed down. Smithers was obeying orders. Tommy hung close by the vision instrument, his hands moving vaguely and helplessly, as one makes gestures without volition when anxious for someone else to duplicate the movements for which he sets the example.

He saw Denham, very near, inspecting the smoking thing on the ground suspiciously. The smoke-fuse ceased to burn. Denham stared. After an age-long delay, he picked up the missile Tommy had prepared. And Tommy saw that there was a cord attached to it. He had fastened that cord when planning to try to communicate with the men of the Golden City, when he had expected them to be victorious.

But he saw Denham's face light up with pathetic hope. He called to Evelyn. He hobbled excitedly to her, babbling....

Tommy watched, and his heart pounded suddenly as Evelyn turned and smiled in the direction in which she knew the dimensoscope must be. A huge butterfly, its wings a full yard across, fluttered past her head. Denham talked excitedly to her. A clumsy batlike thing swooped by overhead. Its shadow blanketed her face for an instant. A running animal, small and long, ran swiftly in full view from one side of the dimensoscope's field of vision to the other. Then a snake, curiously horned, went writhing past....

Denham talked excitedly. He turned and made gestures as of writing, toward the spot where he had picked up Tommy's message. He began to search for a charred stick where the Ragged Men had built a fire some days now past. A fleeing furry thing sped across his feet, running....

Denham looked up. And Evelyn was staring now. She was staring in the direction of the Golden City. And now what was almost a wave of animals, all wild and all fleeing, swept across the field of vision of the dimensoscope. There were gazelles, it seemed—slender-limbed, graceful animals, at any rate—and there were tiny hooved things which might have been eohippi, and then a monstrous armadillo clanked and rattled past....

Tommy swung the dimensoscope. He gasped. All the animal world was in flight. The insects had taken to wing. Flying creatures were soaring upward and streaking through the clear blue sky, and all in the one direction. And then out of the morass came monstrous shapes; misshapen, unbelievable reptilian shapes, which fled bellowing thunderously for the

tree-fern forest. They were gigantic, those things from the morass. They were hideous. They were things out of nightmares, made into flabby flesh. There were lizards and what might have been gigantic frogs, save that frogs possess no tails. And there were long and snaky necks terminating in infinitesimal heads, and vast palpitating bodies following those impossible small brain-cases, and long tapering tails that thrashed mightily as the ghastly things fled bellowing....

And the cause of the mad panic was a slowly moving white curtain of mist. It was flowing over the marsh, moving with apparent deliberation, but, as Tommy saw, actually very swiftly. It shimmered and quivered and moved onward steadily. Its upper surface gleamed with elusive prismatic colors. It had blotted out the horizon and the Golden City, and it came onward....

Denham made frantic, despairing gestures toward the dimensoscope. The thing was coming too fast. There was no time to write. Denham held high the cord that trailed from the message-bearing missile. He

gesticulated frantically, and raced to the gutted steel globe and heaved mightily upon it and swung it about so that Tommy saw a great steel ring set in its side, which had been hidden before. He made more gestures, urgently, and motioned Evelyn inside.

Tommy struck at his forehead.

“It’s poison gas,” he muttered. “Revenge for the smashed-up vehicle.... They knew it by an automatic radio signal, maybe. This is their way of wiping out the Ragged Men.... Poison gas.... It’ll kill Denham and Evelyn.... He wants me to do something....”

He drew back, staring, straining every nerve to think.... And somehow his eyes were drawn to the back of the laboratory and he saw Smithers teetering on his feet, with his hands clasped queerly to his body, and a strange man standing in the door of the laboratory with an automatic pistol in his hand. The automatic had a silencer on it, and its clicking had been drowned out, anyhow, by the roaring of the crude-oil engine.

The man was small and dark and natty. His lips were drawn back in a peculiar mirthless grin as Smithers teetered stupidly back and forth and then fell....

The explosion of Tommy's own revolver astounded him as much as it did Jacaro's gunman. He did not ever remember drawing it or aiming. The natty little gunman was blotted out by a spouting mass of white smoke—and suddenly Tommy knew what it was that Denham wanted him to do.

There was rope in a loose and untidy coil beneath a work bench. Tommy sprang to it in a queer, nightmarish activity. He knew what was happening, of course. Von Holtz had seen the magnetic catapult at work. That couldn't be destroyed or its workings hidden like the ring catapult of Denham's design. He'd gone out to call in Jacaro's men. And they'd shot down Smithers as a cold-blooded preliminary to the seizure of the instrument Jacaro wanted.

It was necessary to defend the laboratory. But Tommy could not spare the time. That white mist was moving upon Evelyn and her father, in that other world. It

was death, as the terror of the wild things demonstrated. They had to be helped....

He knotted the rope to the end of the cord that vanished curiously somewhere among the useless mass of rings. He tugged at the cord—and it was tugged in return. Denham, in another world, had felt his signal and had replied to it....

A window smashed suddenly and a bullet missed Tommy's neck by inches. He fired at that window, and absorbedly guided the knot of the rope past its vanishing point. The knot ceased to exist and the rope crept onward—and suddenly moved more and more swiftly to a place where abruptly it was not. For the length of half an inch, the rope hurt the eyes that looked at it. Beyond that it was not possible to see it at all.

Tommy leaped up. He plunged ahead of two separate spurts of shots from two separate windows. The shots pierced the place where he had been. He was racing for the crude-oil engine. There was a chain wound upon a drum, there, and a clutch attached the drum

to the engine.

He stopped and seized the repeating shotgun Smithers had brought as his own weapon against Jacaro's gangsters. He sent four loads of buckshot at the windows of the laboratory. A man yelled.

And Tommy had dropped the gun to knot the rope to the chain, desperately, fiercely, in a terrible haste.

The chain began to pay out to that peculiar vanishing point which was here an entry-way to another world—perhaps another universe.

A bullet nicked his ribs. He picked up the gun and fired it nearly at random. He saw Smithers moving feebly, and Tommy had a vast compassion for Smithers, but— He shuddered suddenly. Something had struck him a heavy blow in the shoulder. And something else battered at his leg. There was no sound that could be heard above the thunder of the crude-oil motor, but Tommy, was queerly aware of buzzing things flying about him, and of something very warm flowing down his body and down his leg.

And he felt very dizzy and weak and extremely tired.... He could not see clearly, either.

But he had to wait until Denham had the chain fast to the globe. That was the way he had intended to come back, of course. The ring was in the globe, and this chain was in the laboratory to haul the globe back from wherever it had been sent. And Von Holtz had disconnected it before sending away the globe with Denham in it. If the chain remained unbroken, of course it could be hauled in, as it would turn all necessary angles and force the globe to follow those angles, whatever they might be....

Tommy was on his hands and knees, and men were saying savagely:

“Where’s that thing, hey? Where’s th’ thing Jacaro wants?”

He wanted to tell them that they should say if the chain had stopped moving to a place where it ceased to exist, so that he could throw a clutch and bring Denham and his daughter back from the place where

Von Holtz had marooned them when he wanted to steal Denham's secret. Tommy wanted to explain that. But the floor struck him in the face, and something said to him:

"They've shot you."

But it did not seem to matter, somehow, and he lay very still until he felt himself strangling, and he was breathing in strong ammonia which made his eyes smart and his tired lungs gasp.

Then he saw flames, and heard a motor car roaring away from close by the laboratory.

"They've stolen the catapult and set fire to the place," he remembered dizzily, "and now they're skipping out...."

Even that did not seem to matter. But then he heard the chain clank, next to him on the floor. The white mist! Denham and Evelyn waiting for the white mist to reach them, and Denham jerking desperately on the chain to signal that he was ready....

The flames had released ammonia from the metal Von Holtz had made. That had roused Tommy. But it did not give him strength. It is impossible to say where Tommy's strength came from, when somehow he crawled to the clutch lever, with the engine roaring steadily above him, and got one hand on the lever, and edged himself up, and up, and up, until he could swing his whole weight on that lever. That instant of dangling hurt excruciatingly, too, and Tommy saw only that the drum began to revolve swiftly, winding the chain upon it, before his grip gave way.

And the chain came winding in and in from nowhere, and the tall laboratory filled more and more thickly with smoke, and lurid flames appeared somewhere, and a rushing sound began to be audible as the fire roared upward to the inflammable roof, and the engine ran thunderously....

Then, suddenly, there was a shape in the middle of the laboratory floor. A huge globular shape which it hurt the eyes to look upon. It became visible out of nowhere as if evoked by magic amid the flames of hell. But it came, and was solid and substantial, and it

slid along the floor upon small wheels until it wound up with a crash against the winding drum, and the chain shrieked as it tightened unbearably—and the engine choked and died.

Then a door opened in the monstrous globe. Two figures leaped out, aghast. Two ragged, tattered, strangely-armed figures, who cried out to each other and started for the door. But the girl stumbled over Tommy and called, choking, to her father. Groping toward her, he found Smithers. And then Tommy smiled drowsily to himself as soft arms tugged bravely at him, and a slender, glorious figure staggered with him to fresh air.

“It’s Von Holtz,” snapped Denham, and coughed as he fought his way to the open. “I’ll blast him to hell with these things we brought back....”

That was the last thing Tommy knew until he woke up in bed with a feeling of many bandages and an impression that his lungs hurt.

Denham seemed to have heard him move. He looked

in the door.

“Hullo, Reames. You’re all right now.”

Tommy regarded him curiously until he realized. Denham was shaved and fully clothed. That was the strangeness about him. Tommy had been watching him for many days as his clothing swiftly deteriorated and his beard grew.

“You are, too, I see,” he said weakly. “I’m damned glad.” Then he felt foolish, and querulous, and as if he should make some apology, and instead said, “But five dimensions does seem extreme. Three is enough for ordinary use, and four is luxurious. Five seems to be going a bit too far.”

Denham blinked, and then grinned suddenly. Tommy had admired the man who could face so extraordinary a situation with such dogged courage, and now he found, suddenly, that he liked Denham.

“Not too far,” said Denham grimly. “Look!” He held up one of the weapons Tommy had seen in that other

world, one of the golden-colored truncheons. “I brought this back. The same metal they built that wagon of theirs with. All their weapons. Most of their tools—as I know. It’s gold, man! They use gold in that world as we use steel here. That’s why Jacaro was ready to kill to get the secret of getting there. Von Holtz enlisted him.”

“How did you know—” began Tommy weakly.

“Smithers,” said Denham. “We dragged both of you out before the lab went-up in smoke. He’s going to be all right, too. Evelyn’s nursing both of you. She wants to talk to you, but I want to say this first: You did a damned fine thing, Reames! The only man who could have saved us, and you just about killed yourself doing it. Smithers saw you swing that clutch lever with three bullets in your body. And you’re a scientist, too. You’re my partner, Reames, in what we do in the fifth dimension.”

Tommy blinked. “But five dimensions does seem extreme....”

“We are the Interdimensional Trading Company,” said Denham, smiling. “Somehow, I think we’ll find something in this world we can trade for the gold in that. And we’ve got to get there, Reames, because Jacaro will surely try to make use of that catapult principle you worked out. He’ll raise the devil; and I think the people of that Golden City would be worth knowing. No, we’re partners. Sooner or later, you’ll know how I feel about what you’ve done. I’m going to bring Evelyn in here now.”

He vanished. An instant later Tommy heard a voice—a girl’s voice. His heart began to pound. Denham came back into the room and with him was Evelyn. She smiled warmly upon Tommy, though as his eyes fell blankly upon the smart sport clothes she was again wearing, she flushed.

“My daughter Evelyn,” said Denham. “She wants to thank you.”

And Tommy felt a warm soft hand pressing his, and he looked deep into the eyes of the girl he had never before spoken to, but for whom he had risked his life,

and whom he knew he would love forever. There were a thousand things crowding to his lips for utterance. He had watched Evelyn, and he loved her—

“H-how do you do?” said Tommy, lamely. “I’m—awfully glad to meet you.”

But before he was well he learned to talk more sensibly.

February 1931

69 Werewolves of War, by Desmond Winter Hall

The story of the "Torpedo Plan" and of Capt. Lance's heroic part in America's last mighty battle with the United Slavs.

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings: taking with him the cord



- - -

Under the mesh of his gas-mask the lean lines of his jaw went taut. Tense, steely fingers flipped to the knobbed control instruments; the gleaming single-seater scout plane catapulted in a screaming somersault. Lance's ever-wary sixth sense told him the tongues of disintegrating flame had licked the plane's protected belly, and for the fact that it was protected he thanked again his stupendous luck. He pulled savagely at the squat control stick; the four Rahl-Diesels unleashed a torrent of power; and the slim scout rose like a comet, and hurtled, the altitude dial's nervous finger proclaimed, to ten thousand feet. Lance eased off the power, relaxed slightly, and glanced below.

They'd started off a squadron of fifteen planes. Thirteen had crumpled beneath that treacherous, stabbing curtain of disintegrating flame. Only two of them were left—he and Praed.

Praed, of course!

The fellow's plane was pirouetting nearby. Lance was the squadron leader. He jammed his thin-lipped mouth close to the "mike" and rasped:

"They trapped us again! There's some damn spy at our base. Stand by, Praed! They'll send up a few men to wipe us out, too ... and we're goin' to square the account!"

He listened for Praed's answer. Presently it came.

"I can't! They got two of my motors. I'm limping badly. We'd better beat it while we can."

Lance's mouth curled. He roared:

"Go on, then, beat it! But I'm goin' to take a couple of 'em, anyway." Disgusted, filled with red anger, he flung the phones from his head, watched Praed's plane whirl its stubby nose for home, settled himself alertly in the low, padded seat and concentrated his attention on the ground below.

He'd been right. Tiny, gray-clad figures were pouring

from their barracks, rushing madly towards the dozen or so planes neatly drawn up on the field. Lance's mouth twitched. They probably wondered, down there, why the devil he didn't beat it—like Praed! He stroked the lever which controlled his five gas bombs, centered his battery of incendiary-bullet machine-guns and ruthlessly shoved the control stick full over.

The Rahl-Diesels pumped at full power; his plane plummeted downwards with the speed of light, a hurtling shell of steel. His unexpected move took the men below by surprise. Lance knew they needed at least ten minutes to prepare another salvo of disintegrating flame; he had about four minutes left.

There was a restless, thudding chatter, and his bullets began to mow them down.

Lance could see the horrified expressions of the men beneath, and chuckled grimly as they sought to escape the wrath of his hot guns. He flung bursts of spouting, acid-filled lead at the defenseless planes, and saw two of them collapse in shrouds of acrid white smoke. And still he dove.

At a bare one hundred feet he tugged the control stick back, and the tiny scout groaned under the pull of her motors. Then her snout jolted upwards. Lance pounded the gas bomb lever, and smiled a tight smile as he sensed the five pills sloping down from their compartment in the scout's belly.

A second later came a rolling, ear-numbing crash. Lance, safe at a perch of a few thousand feet, grinned as his narrowed eyes beheld the sticky curtain of death-crammed gas hug over the enemy base.

"That'll quiet 'em for a few minutes!" he muttered savagely.

A few minutes—but not more. And he had no more bombs; his ammunition belts were nearly depleted. "I guess," he murmured, "I'd better follow that quitter, Praed. I've paid 'em for the boys they got, anyway!"

He levelled the plane out, threw a last glance at the carpet of gas he had laid, and spurred the purring Rahl-Diesels to their limit. His speed dial flashed round to five hundred, five-fifty—seventy—and finally

rested, quivering, at the scout's full six hundred miles per hour.

Under the streamlined plane's speeding body the gnarled, bomb-torn terrain of Nevada hurtled by. A rather sad frown creased Lance's prematurely old brow as he glimpsed it. Thousands of lives had been thrown into that ground; the hot, tumbled waste was doused with freely-sacrificed blood, the blood of whole regiments of America's heroic First Home Army. Martyred men! Lance couldn't help swearing to himself at the bitter thought of that terrible reckoning day. It was the price his country had paid for her continued ignoring of the festering peril overseas. Slaughtered like sheep, those glorious regiments had been! Helpless, almost, before the ultra-modern war weapons of the United Slav hordes, they'd stopped the numbingly quick advance merely by the weight of their bodies. Like little Belgium, in 1914. They'd held the Slavs to California, ravished, war-desolated California.

The thin front-line trenches far behind, Lance began a slanting dive that raised his speed well over six

hundred. Through the front magnifying mirror he spied the squat khaki buildings of his base.

Werewolves of War, the batch of planes he belonged to had been christened, and it was a richly deserved title. In front of the front they fought, detailed to desperate, harrying missions, losing an average of ten men a day. The ordeal of gas and fire and acid bullets added five years to a man's brow overnight—if he served with the Werewolves of War.

Lance was only twenty-four, but his hair was splotched with dead gray strands; his eyes were hard and weary; his face lined with new wrinkles. Ah, well, it was war—and a losing war, he had to admit, that they fought. If a miracle didn't come, America would crumble even as old Europe had, before the overwhelming Slavish troops.

Even now, as Lance knew through various rumors, the Slavs were massed for a grand attack. And with what could America hold them back?

His helicopter props spun, and the scout nestled down lightly on the tarmac. Lance switched off the

faithful Rahl-Diesels, swung open the tiny door and leaped from the enclosed cockpit.

"Sir," he rapped to thin, stern-browed Colonel Douglas, "there's no longer any doubt in my mind. This is the fifth time we've been anticipated—trapped! The enemy is informed directly of the attacking plans of our scout details. There's a spy at this base!" He lowered his eyes for a second and said in a queer tone of voice: "Thirteen of 'em went down to-day."

Colonel Douglas' tired face showed the never-ceasing strain he was under. He clasped hands behind his back, took a few nervous turns up and down the small office and finally, with a somewhat hopeless sigh, muttered:

"I know, Lance, I know. The devils! They seem to be aware of everything we plan. Yet what can we do? Look at the territory our front lines cover! More than two thousand miles of loosely held ground. And we're so damnably organized, man! Look here!"

He strode to the huge map which covered entirely

one wall of the little room and ran his forefinger down the long red line, signifying the American front, which stretched crookedly from the Canadian border to the Gulf of California. Parallel to it was another line, of black—the United Slavs.

"It's so damned easy," Colonel Douglas said, "for a spy to slip over." He sighed again. "I fought in the scrap of 1917 as a kid of twenty; it was different then. But this is 1938, and it's a scientific war we're trying to fight." He sat down in his swivel chair. "How—how did they wipe you out to-day?"

"That blasted disintegrating flame again," Lance told him swiftly. "It's obvious, Colonel: how did the Slavs know we were going to raid that comparatively unimportant base of theirs at such and such a time? They had the flame shooters all ready for us—and at a place where they've never had them before! We came up at twenty-five thousand feet, dropped down in a full power dive, and"—he gestured widely—"biff! The flames caught us neatly at the regulation thousand feet. They got thirteen men. Only two got away, Praed and myself." His keen eyes were inquiring, and the

colonel interpreted their look correctly.

"Praed," he murmured. "Yes, I saw him come back, by himself. He said you were following. Two of his motors were shot. He seems to bear a charmed life, doesn't he?"

Lance nodded. He didn't like to hint at the thought he had in mind. It seemed a cowardly, stab-in-the-back thing to do. Yet it was duty, and there was no questioning duty.

"I've never seen Praed shoot down an enemy plane," he said slowly. "This is the fifth time we've been ambushed—and Praed's never been caught. Somehow, he's always seemed to be aware of what was coming."

"You mean—?" the colonel questioned.

Lance shook his head. "I don't want to commit myself, Colonel Douglas, but—I'm suggesting that we—well—keep our eyes peeled, and perhaps watch certain members of the outfit more closely."

Douglas rose as his orderly, Ranth, came into the room. "Find Lieutenant Praed for me," the colonel ordered crisply. Then, turning to Lance, he said: "You'd better knock off a few hours' sleep. You are worn out."

Lance watched the orderly, Ranth, salute and leave. Ranth was heavy, thick-built, with closely set eyes. The young squadron leader was suddenly conscious that he was, as the colonel said, worn out; his limbs seemed leaden, his eyelids heavy. "I think you're right, sir," he murmured, and walked out onto the field.

Seeing Praed's machine drawn up with the overall-clad figure of a mechanic fussing at its motors, he wandered over to survey it. The scout was an exact replica of his, a model of the famous Goshawk type. It was all motor—everything being sacrificed to speed. On either side of the stubby brow of the fuselage, which held the death-dealing battery of three machine-guns, were set the four Rahl-Diesel motors, back to back. The pilot's tiny enclosed cockpit was thus surrounded by engines. In the V-shaped, smooth-

lined wings were the two helicopter props; further back, inside the steel-sheathed, bullet-like fuselage, the radio outfit and fuel tanks. The craft's rounded belly covered the gas bomb compartment.

The mechanic was a little cockney Englishman, a fugitive, like all his countrymen, from the horror which had stricken England suddenly and left her wallowing in her life blood. He looked up at Lance, and a smile broke forth on his wizened, sharp little face.

"It's got me beat, sir," he said in his curious, twanging voice. "Lieutenant Praed, 'e sez to me, 'Somethin' wrong with two of me motors,' 'e sez. 'They quit on me quite sudden like. Look 'em over, will you?' 'e sez. So I been lookin' 'em over. But they ain't nothin' wrong with the bloody things, sir—nothin' at all!"

"It does seem funny, doesn't it, Wells?" Lance said levelly. He'd known it all along. Praed was a quitter—a yellow-belly—besides being—But he stopped there. He had no definite proof. It was unjust to accuse a man of *that* without definite, positive proof.

The little mechanic muttered some mysterious cockney curse, and then said, in an admiring tone:

"'Ow many of the swines' planes 'ave you shot down now, sir?"

"About twenty, I think," Lance told him gruffly. The cockney shot his breath out with a whistle.

"Cripes! You'll be up to that there Captain Hay soon if you keeps it up, sir!"

Lance laughed. Hay, the almost legendary hero of the American Air Force—who had shot down, so latest rumors said, fifty Slav planes—was far above him. "I'll never reach Hay's record, Wells. I'll be doing pretty well if I bag half as many!" Then, seeing Ranth, the orderly, followed by Praed, he strode quickly away and came face to face with the latter.

For a moment the two men eyed each other, a taut silence between them. Praed's thin, sun-blackened countenance was immovable, masklike. His blue-green eyes met Lance's steadily. Finally Lance

snorted and burst out:

"Why the hell did you run away, Praed? Scared stiff?"

Praed's low voice, devoid of all trace of emotion, asked: "What makes you think I was scared, Lance?"

"You know damn well what makes me think it! That lousy crack about your motors being shot!"

"Two of my motors were limping."

Lance gave a sarcastic chuckle. "Ask Wells about that, why don't you? He's got a few ideas on the subject."

Praed repeated: "Two of my motors were limping," and abruptly he turned away, leaving Lance fuming, and went into Colonel Douglas' office.

What would Douglas say to him? Accuse him outright of his suspicions? Put him under arrest as a spy? But he couldn't do that: there was, after all, no proof. Lance swore to himself; then, feeling a wave of weariness surge over him, went to the shack he was

quartered in, kicked off his battered boots, stripped away his Sam Browne, and flung his lean body out on the hard, gray-sheeted cot. Seconds later he was lost in the sleep that comes to the physically exhausted. The desperate situation America was in, the whole savage war—everything, faded from his mind.

But to right and left of that cot stretched others—empty. The brave squadron Lance had led into the blue sky that morning now lay charred skeletons around the flame-throwers that had struck them down.

And in a dozen other aircraft bases behind the hard pressed lines were other empty cots. Time and time again the Slav planes shot down two to the Americans' one; time and time again the treacherous disintegrating flames—the weapon which baffled America's scientists—had struck down whole squadrons that had been lured into traps, even as Lance's had been lured.

And even the Slav forces pushed forward....

Part 2

"You're wanted by Colonel Douglas, sir."

Lance felt a hand jarring his shoulder; he turned sleepily over, yawned, and stared up into the dark, full-cheeked face of Ranth, the orderly.

"Huh?"

"Colonel Douglas wants you," repeated Ranth. "It's five o'clock, sir."

Wearily Lance pulled on his boots and adjusted the military belt. The night was hot and sticky; somewhere, miles to the rear of the base, the batteries of long-distance guns were beginning their nightly serenade. Lance followed the orderly's broad, chunky back to the colonel's office.

The colonel gazed up with tired eyes from the welter of maps on his desk.

"Lance," he said, "I'm changing the routine of the

night patrol. A fresh batch of youngsters came in this afternoon to fill the empty files; two dozen new planes arrived by transport, too. I'm sending ten of them over for the night patrol; Stephens will take your place. I've got another errand for you—and Praed."

Lance was conscious that Ranth was standing quietly behind the colonel's chair. Douglas ordered him to attend to some errand and the orderly left.

"I had an interview with Praed," the colonel went on. "I didn't exactly accuse him of anything definite, but I think I threw a bit of a scare into him. To-night we'll give him the acid test.

"You and he will fly over to-night to investigate Hill 333. There have been rumors that the Slavs are massing there, and we want positive information. There's sure to be a fight. Watch Praed carefully. If he steers clear of any scrapping, well have enough to court-martial him on. Understand?"

Lance nodded.

"Right. It's a dangerous errand, Lance, but I'm confident you'll come through, as always. There's no one else who could handle the job. God, man, you're getting close to Hay's record! You'll be the top-notch of the service soon!"

The young man laughed briefly. "No danger of that. When do we take off, sir?"

Douglas consulted his watch. "Seven-fifteen. Come and get the dope from these maps. Hill 333's rather difficult to find."

"Anything been happening at the front, sir?"

The colonel passed both fine-fingered hands over his lined face. He said quietly: "Yes. The Slavs took twenty-five miles from us down in the lower sector. Just wiped our boys out. Those damnable flame-throwers and bullet-proof tanks, supported by God knows how many hundreds of planes. It's hell, Lance! Headquarters thinks they're going to unleash a general attack all along the line in the next few days. And our resources—well, our back's against the wall.

We're coming to death grips, man."

Seven-fifteen....

Lance pressed the starting button. His four motors choked, sputtered, then burst into a sweet, full-throated roar. He glanced over at Praed's plane, spun the small helicopter props over and pushed down the accelerator. The plane quivered, stuck its snout up and leaped like an arrow into the clean, darkening air. Lance gunned it to ten thousand feet, Praed following him neatly. Praed was a good pilot, no doubt about that. The two fighting machines hung for a second side by side; Lance eased off his helicopters and streaked away into the gloom at a breath-taking five hundred.

"I hope," muttered Colonel Douglas as the two tiny scouts sped from sight, "that everything goes smoothly. They're the men to do it, anyway. No better pilots in the whole service."

"Wot abaht that there Captain Hay, sir?" put in Wells, the mechanic, standing nearby. Colonel Douglas

smiled.

"Oh, of course!" he amended. "I'd forgotten Hay!"

Once more they were anticipated! Lance, at thirty thousand feet—the Rahl-Diesels, with their perfected superchargers, were easily capable of a ceiling of sixty—had hovered above the position of Hill 333, pulled on his gas-mask and said through the microphone to Praed:

"Power dive to three thousand feet. Release your flares and take in all you can before they send up planes. We'll take 'em by surprise, but there's bound to be a fight. Got it?"

The steady reply came back: "Okay."

Whereat Lance set his teeth in his customary fighting grin, jockeyed up his ammunition belts, glanced at the flare-parachutes folded alongside the cabin and plunged the scout in a dive that tipped six hundred and fifty miles and threatened to crack the speed dial.

But surprise? Nothing doing! Like angry hornets five Slav planes pounced on them at ten thousand feet. They'd been waiting there! Lance cursed savagely. He flung off his flares, Immelmanned up, and in less than two seconds had sent one Slav shrieking to the ground in flames. For the moment forgetting Praed, Lance followed after his flares, three Slavs attempting to sight their guns on the twisting, writhing, corkscrewing body of his Goshawk. He knew there were disintegrating flame-throwers below, but gambled on their not shooting because of the enemy scouts diving with him.

Flattening out at perhaps a thousand feet, Lance threw a rapid stare at the bulk of Hill 333. He drew his breath in sharply.

Lit dazzlingly by the bleaching white of the slow-floating flares, huge rows of the dreaded Slav tanks were clustered all around the hill!

As he looked, ten more Slav planes came soaring up from the ground. This was too hot! The thought of Praed stabbed through Lance's whirling brain; he

pulled the scout around, doubled over the three closing in on his tail, and belched lead for an instant at one he'd caught off guard. It collapsed like a punctured paper bag. Lance grinned and bounded to the upper regions. The two other Slavs let the crazy Yank go for the instant, joining forces with the ten brothers coming to help them out.

Lance, again at ten thousand, looked for Praed. Far above, he glimpsed two planes, circling and diving. Praed seemed to be fighting, at any rate! As he watched, the two scouts catapulted still higher; became tiny, almost imperceptible dots, visible only in the reflected light of the flares. Then Lance felt a shaft of ice along his spine.

The two planes had practically hugged each other for a second. Then one of them fell away, somersaulted, tumbled down wildly—out of control.

It passed Lance like a falling rock.

And it was Praed's scout!

"My God!" muttered Lance. "He's been shot down!"

The next moment the twelve Slavs were on him like a hurricane. Motors roaring, Lance stood them off—flinging a burst of lead here, dropping out of range here, looping, catapulting, zooming—fazing them with every trick he knew. A dozen times he sensed the zinging wrath of storms of bullets, a dozen times he escaped death by the breadth of a hair. Not for nothing was he called one of the best pilots in the service, second only to Hay.

He bagged another of the Slavs, and began to think of getting away. Praed had proved himself, but had been killed in doing so. He's got the dope on Hill 333. Now for the getaway.

As he whirled, another Slav plane—the one that had got Praed—dove down from above. And, in the last second of the ghostly light of the flares, Lance's bewildered eyes saw the face of the man inside it.

That face was Praed's!

Praed, inside an enemy scout! Praed firing at him!
Praed, not dead!

Lance was dumbfounded. He almost died, just then, for he felt his senses stagger, and relaxed his maneuvering. Praed! What—how—He couldn't begin to reckon it out.

If the flares hadn't died at that instant, Lance must have been shot down. Luckily, they expired; pitch darkness washed over everything. The lights on the Slav planes switched on, their prying beams fingering the sky for Lance's plane. But Lance was somewhat himself again. He jammed the accelerator down, dove headlong, flattened out and streaked for home. The speed of the Goshawk snatched him faithfully from the jaws of the Slavs. He left then milling behind. Left Praed with them!

Colonel Douglas was waiting for him. Lance's face must have been a study, for the elder man laughed shortly. "You need a drink!" he decided, and poured out a stiff tot of rum. Lance downed it with a nervous gulp and sprawled in a chair, the glass held weakly in

quivering fingers.

Dead silence brooded over the whole base. Even the muttering guns were still. One green-shaded light threw the maps on Douglas' desk into glaring prominence; besides that, there was no illumination anywhere in the 'drome. Lance knew he had a thumping headache and that his eyes were lumps of pain. The glass fell from his hand and crashed on the floor. It seemed to stir the young captain, for at last he looked up and met the colonel's inquiring gaze.

"Well?" The colonel was terse.

"I saw Praed shot down," Lance mumbled, as if to himself, "and then I saw him—"

"Wait!" Douglas strode rapidly to the door which led to the other rooms of the building. After glancing to right and left, with an explanatory "Walls sometimes have ears, you know!" he locked the door carefully again, came back, and said:

"Talk in a whisper! How about Hill 333?"

"Tanks massed there," Lance said slowly. "Yeh, I saw that, all right. They must be intending an attack on that sector. But—but—Praed—"

"What happened?"

Lance told him of the scrap, how Praed's plane had apparently rubbed wings with a Slav and then tumbled down, out of control. He concluded: "I figured that Praed was all right, that he'd proved himself, that he wasn't a spy, as we'd thought. *But the next moment I saw him in the Slav plane that had bagged his!*"

His wondering eyes sought the colonel's lean face. Lance expected to see it express amazement, incredulity. It didn't, though. He laughed!

While Lance gaped, the older man went to the delicate machinery of the radiophone in one corner of the trim office. He clasped the earphones over his head, and spoke into the mike: "Headquarters, Air Force, Washington, Douglas, Base 5, speaking."

A tense moment passed while his radio call was put through. Presently a green light flashed on the board. Douglas said swiftly: "Headquarters? Base 5, Colonel Douglas. Tanks massed around Hill 333; enemy evidently contemplates full attack on corresponding sector of our line. They know a scout of ours observed it, however; perhaps that will induce them to change their plans. This next is extremely important: *The first step of the Torpedo Plan has been successful!*"

For awhile he listened intently, replying with short-clipped affirmatives. Then he hung the headphones up and turned to the bewildered Lance. Colonel Douglas laughed again and rubbed his hands exultantly.

"What the hell—" Lance began. The other pulled out a drawer of his desk and took from it a small placard.

"Do you recognize the photo?" he asked smilingly.

Lance looked at it. It was the picture of a man in the uniform of a captain of the Air Force, a row of battle ribbons on his straight, khaki-clad chest. But it was the figure's face that Lance stared at.

"Sure," he said finally. "It's a picture of Praed. But what—"

"Not Praed," corrected the colonel. "Not Praed. Captain Basil Hay."

Part 3

"Good Lord!" Lance exclaimed without knowing he did so. Praed—Hay! The same man! Then that was the secret; that explained things! Hay, the hero of the force!

"You're entitled to a few explanations," Douglas said. "I'll give you the core of the whole scheme. There's no need to tell you that it must be guarded with your life." He drew his chair closer to Lance's.

"Yes, it's true. The man you knew as Praed in reality is Captain Hay. You see, Lance, headquarters was taking no chances with what I just called the Torpedo Plan. Every move had to be conducted with the utmost secrecy. Had to be! For the Torpedo Plan is, in some ways, America's last hope.

"Our base, No. 5, was chosen as the center of activity, the base from which the steps paving the way for the plan would be taken. The two best pilots in the service were needed. You and Hay were chosen.

"It was decided it would be best to mask Hay's real identity. So, officially, he was sent to the hospital; in reality he came here, under the name of Praed. Why? Because there's a spy somewhere—we don't seem to be able to track him; he's infernally clever—and if the famous Captain Hay was switched to Base 5, putting the two best pilots in the service together, that spy'd know something was in the air. Understand?"

Lance nodded dumbly. A great light was beginning to shower him.

"To more completely mask our true purpose," the colonel continued, "Hay was instructed to make it appear as if he were a spy. And it was a damned hard job! The real spy, whoever he is, and wherever he is, would thus be additionally fooled; for all he'd know, the Slavs might have sent another over to back him up. That's why Hay never shot down an enemy plane. Says something about his skill as a pilot, doesn't it? Never able to defend himself, save by maneuvering. He's a great flyer!"

Lance could only nod dumbly again.

"After a couple of weeks at this base," Douglas went on, "Hay was to cross the lines one night with you accompanying him. You, unintentionally, would thus occupy the enemy planes while Hay attended to the real business of the evening. And you did splendidly!"

"The real business?" Lance questioned. "What the devil was that? I thought the real business was to get the dope on Hill 333."

"So it was—partially. But also to take the first step of the Torpedo Plan, which was for Hay to switch over to a Slav plane."

"What?"

The colonel repeated his statement, somewhat dryly. Lance's square jaw dropped abruptly. "But—but—" he exclaimed, "how the devil could he do that?"

Colonel Douglas grinned.

"By a very neat contraption from the brain of one of our most valuable scientists," he explained. "Hay's

scout was specially fitted up before you left; while you were sleeping, in fact. Two experts from Washington arrived with that batch of new recruits this afternoon. A tiny sliding door was cut in the fuselage of the scout and a sort of folding ladder put inside. It was motivated by some rather complex spring-work; but the really ingenious thing about it was the powerful electro-magnet at its base.

"It's rather over my head," he smiled. "I'm a plain fighting man, and sometimes it seems that scientists and not fighting men are going to win this war.... But, at any rate, it worked like this:

"Hay lures, or maneuvers, a Slav plane away from its fellows, and while you're down below entertaining the others, flies wing to wing with it. He touches the spring of his ladder and it shoots out, powerfully magnetized, and clamps onto the steel fuselage of the Slav. The automatic control keeps Hay's scout steady, and the ladder is so highly attractive that the Slav simply can't get away. Hay crosses the gulf, taking with him the cord which controls the electro-magnet. He forces his way into the Slav, shoots down its pilot,

releases the pull of the magnet, and—there you are! Our best pilot in possession of a Slav plane, and clad in a Slav officer's uniform! Do you get the idea now?"

Lance strove for appropriate words. "Gee!" he spluttered. "It's—it's wonderful! And to think I tried to start a fight with Hay! I wish I'd known before. But I suppose," he added, "it was best to let not even me in on it, to keep it absolutely secret."

"Exactly!"

"And now what's Hay's mission?" Lance asked eagerly.

Colonel Douglas' face became sober. "A damnably dangerous one, and a mighty desperate one. As I said, the Torpedo Plan, which Hay is striving to carry out, seems to be America's last chance. We're holding the United Slavs, but only just. We simply can't break their line or make any headway against them; and when they do unleash their big push, there's nothing to stop them! So we're gambling everything on this slim hope.

"American science," he continued, "has perfected a weapon which is called the 'flying torpedo.' It's a ghastly thing, too. Damn it, I actually feel sorry for the poor devils it bursts on! It's a sort of riposte to their disintegrating flame.

"Picture a huge tanklike affair of steel, one hundred feet long. Picture a few dozen of them! Picture them crammed to overflowing with tons of glyco-scarzite, the most destructive explosive the mind of man has yet conceived. An explosive that can't be hurled in a shell and can't be dropped in a bomb from a plane. A pound or so of it, man, lays waste a square mile of anything! Even our scientists are a bit afraid of it. They've been trying to think up a way of unleashing it at the Slavs. And these flying torpedoes seem to be the answer.

"The torpedoes are purely mechanical. Therefore, they can soar to any height whatsoever. Twenty, thirty, even forty miles. All right. Now, picture a dozen or so of these torpedoes soaring over the most important Slav bases and headquarters, thirty miles above the earth, at night, of course, and absolutely

invisible to the most powerful search-rays. They fly without the slightest sounds. Get that? Well, when this squadron of awful death arrives at the exact point over the place to be demolished, the motive force switches off and down they crash. Imagine what will happen when they collide with the ground!" Douglas, with Lance's tense eyes on him, struck a clenched fist into an open palm.

"Tons of glyco-scarzite, Lance! Unleashed, without warning, from miles above! Thirty of these torpedoes, each a hundred feet long, dropping down on the very heart of the Slav invasion! Killing, blowing to bits, rather, every living thing, every fortification, every tree, every tank, every gun, every flame thrower, every plane in a radius of hundreds of miles!"

"God!" came from Lance's numb lips. "God!"

"*But*"—and the colonel held up a straight forefinger—"these torpedoes must be guided from the place they raid!"

Into the silence Lance whispered: "And that—that is

Hay's job?"

"That," Douglas confirmed levelly, "is Hay's job—and yours."

Their eyes met; held. And then Lance's clean young face smiled.

"Thank God, sir," he cried, "that I'm to help strike the blow that'll free our country!"

Colonel Douglas answered his smile with a smile.

"Lance," he said, "it's because Washington has put this job into Hay's and your hands that I know—*I know*—it will succeed."

"It will!"

Douglas lowered his voice again. "This is why those flying torpedoes must be guided from the Slav's innermost base.

"In the first place, they fly too high for an accompanying plane to guide them. In the second, the

power that releases them to hurtle downwards must come from the enemy base itself, to permit of no possible error. This must not fail!"

"But," put in Lance, "how do the torpedoes fly? What motivates them?"

"A closely guarded secret, of course," he was told. "I merely possess a slight comprehension of it. I know that it is an adaptation of that discovery of Professor Singe, two years ago—cosmic attraction. Eventually, perhaps, it will permit interplanetary travel. This use of it is simply the beginning. But it is to America's everlasting glory that a scientist of hers developed it.

"You know how a sliver of wood is propelled by the ripples of a pond? Vibrations of the water, really. Well, evidently there are somewhat similar vibrations in the ether, cosmic force. Each one of these flying torpedoes contains a highly expensive, intricate mechanism which transforms this invisible vibration-power into material propulsion. The mechanism is adjusted to propel the torpedo at such an altitude in such a direction. We possess no means of setting the

machines to *stop* at a certain place and so tumble earthwards. That's where you and Hay come in.

"Hay is now, with forged documents, passing himself off as a regular Slav pilot. He speaks the tongue. Two nights from now, you, Lance, keep a rendezvous with Hay at an isolated ranch in the Lake Tahoe country—the Sola Ranch, where we staged that big fight a few months back."

Lance nodded.

"In your plane is an instrument which is the kernel of the scheme. It arrives here to-morrow. It's a device which shoots an invisible beam fifty miles into the air, a negative beam, in sympathy with the machinery on the torpedoes. Hay sets this device near the Slav headquarters. The torpedo squadron takes off from a few hundred miles behind here, flying in the direction of the heart of the Slav forces. When they run into the beam, their motive power is nullified, and down they fall. Crash! The Slavs are wiped out. Our troops charge forward in a grand attack; the Slavs, with no armament, no reinforcing troops, no supply of tanks

and flame throwers, crumple. The invasion of America is put to an end!"

Lance rose. His face was alight, his eyes burning with strong, unquenchable fire.

"It's great, sir, great! It can't fail! By God, if it takes every last drop of my blood, I'll help Hay put this through!"

Colonel Douglas extended his right hand and Lance's met it in a firm shake. In the thick silence they stood thus for some minutes. Then, without moving so much as a cheek muscle, the colonel whispered, his eyes tense:

"The door! Fling it open! I think someone's been listening!"

Lance switched his alarmed gaze to it. His muscles went taut. The next moment he had leaped half across the room, jammed back the lock, and ripped the door wide.

At the other end of the dim passageway he glimpsed a scurrying figure!

Lance sprang after it with a shout to Douglas. Tearing out his automatic, he flung a burst of lead at the figure, but that instant it wheeled and sped from sight down another passage. And when Lance got there, no one was in sight.

For awhile he probed around, desperately, but could find no sign of anything. The base slept. Sorely troubled, he returned to find the colonel just coming back from an equally barren search:

"Don't think he heard much," said Douglas grimly. "It must have been that damned spy who's been getting information of our movements. I'll have the guards redoubled to prevent him from getting anything through." He smiled at sight of Lance's anxious face. "No need for too much worry, Lance! He couldn't have heard much—the walls are sound-proof and the door fairly tight. Now, you go and rip off some sleep! You need it! No more work for you till Wednesday night—you're too important!"

Sleep! Lance only wished he could. But the thrill of what he'd just heard was too fresh, too new; the blood pumped surgingly through his veins; his brain whirled with the thought of the glorious enterprise he and Hay were aiding so vitally.

Then, too, the night was humid and sweaty. For a while Lance lay on his cot, other sleeping figures to left and right of him, but his own eyes simply would not stay closed. Finally, after perhaps an hour of trying to doze off, he arose and, clad only in breeches and undershirt, wandered outside again with a cigarette glowing in his mouth.

The war might not have been, the night was so silent. Lance strolled lazily around the plane hangars, revelling in what little breeze there was. He seemed to be the only living thing abroad in the night.

Then, suddenly, he flung down his cigarette and ground the butt out quickly. For he saw he was not the only living thing abroad in the night. Sliding rapidly away from the end hangar was a dark form!

Lance crouched instinctively and crept forward. Who was the other wanderer? Not a sentry: they paced a regular beat closer to Douglas' office. Not another, who, like himself, could not sleep and had sought the open. This figure was going somewhere! It had a definite object in mind!

Sheltering himself behind the hangars' bulk, Lance advanced as stealthily as he could. Coming to the end one, he peered round its blunt corner. Fifty yards ahead, crossing a stubbly stretch of open ground, the mysterious prowler hurried onward.

The night was dark, the moon troubled by ragged bursts of listless, heavy clouds. Lance bent almost double and left the shelter of the black hangar. Feeling his way carefully, he followed the other.

Was this the unknown spy? The spy, going to transmit the news he had overheard?

Lance muttered a curse. He had no weapon with him; the spy, if he were a spy, would certainly be armed. But that didn't matter; it was merely unfortunate. He

must track the other down, at all cost.

For some minutes he crept on in this manner. The other kept hurrying forward. Lance noted a clump of brush far ahead; the figure was evidently making for this. And sure enough, as if acting directly on Lance's thought, the dark form entered the patch of growth—and did not come out on the other side.

Lance broke into a trot, eyes wary and alert for sign of his prey. At any second he might be greeted by a salvo of bullets, and every fiber of his lean body was taut.

As he approached the clump of brush he dropped to the ground, and came finally to it on his belly. From a distance of about ten feet, he rose and charged.

Expecting each moment to hear the spit of a revolver, he was more alarmed by what actually did greet him.

Nothing. The patch of brush was empty!

"Well I'll be damned!" Lance murmured. "Where did

he get to?"

He gazed around, bewildered. The growth of bush was about ten feet wide. On either side the flat Nevada plain stretched away—empty. No figure was visible.

Lance was utterly baffled. The fellow had vanished as if by magic. Flown away into thin air!

The young captain stood quite still, listening, probing his puzzled brain.

Then, like a cat, he dropped to the ground again, and pressed an ear to it. For his ears had caught a tiny betraying hum.

A hum! There was a machine of some type near him. He listened intently. The hum came from the ground on which he lay. There had to be a trap-door.

Lance's fingers scrabbled around, and presently found what they looked for.

He seized the ring which enabled one to pull the trap-door back, and was just about to pull when he heard, from below, a voice speaking in Russian. It was, then, the spy!

Lance grasped the ring anew, and, exerting all his strength, hauled the trap-door back.

A narrow passageway was revealed, lit by a lamp. The hum burst with doubled force on his ears. He plunged down, fists clenched, and half tumbled into a tiny room gouged from the soil.

At one end was a mass of machinery, and a microphone hung suspended before it. And speaking into the microphone was the heavy-set form of a man in American uniform, his back to Lance. As the latter charged down, he rose with an alarmed shout, and wheeled around.

"My God!" breathed Lance.

It was Ranth, Colonel Douglas' orderly!

Ranth!

His dark face flushed with fury, he came leaping from his seat. The wicked little revolver hung at his belt sprang out, but Lance's right fist shot forward, knocked Ranth's hand high and sent the gun clattering to the ground. Then, for a moment, they faced each other, the hum of the radiophone droning an ominous accompaniment.

"You!" Lance muttered. "So you were the spy!"

Ranth answered him with a choked oath and leaped forward again.

There were no niceties to that combat. It was a matter of life and death, and each knew it. Ranth would kill him, Lance knew, if he possibly could; and he, he had to kill or capture Ranth. Otherwise the news of the Torpedo Plan would go through, Ranth would return to the base, and the secret of the hidden radio never be known. Another would be put in Lance's place; and when Hay kept his rendezvous at Sola Ranch....

He had to win.

No effort was made at defense, for those first few furious minutes. A veritable fusillade of hurtling fists stormed through the air. They each gave and took equally. Then Ranth's heavy shoulders bunched; cunningly he feinted, then, whirling, swung a vicious right hand smash to Lance's chin.

Lance reeled, fell, seeing Ranth's hate-contorted visage dance queerly in the close air before him. The orderly clutched for his revolver, and Lance bounded up as if spring-impelled, nailed the other with two lightninglike jabs and unleashed all his strength in an uppercut which sprawled Ranth in a limp, quivering heap.

Panting, Lance surveyed him, then turned to get the gun. He felt the shock of thudding flesh in his legs, and fell again with Ranth scrambling on top of him. Steel-ribbed hands pounced on his throat, gouged savagely, while the man above grunted thick curses from his slaver's mouth. Lance struggled fiercely; saw a curtain of black rush down. Desperately he

hooked a booted leg up, craned it over Ranth's back, tugged. The terrible fingers loosened. Lance shook them off, rolled the other over and leaped once more to his feet, right hand clenched and ready.

Ranth staggered up. The young man measured him, pivoted, and smashed his beefy jaw with a clean swing that had every ounce of Lance's hard young body behind it.

The orderly shot back as if struck by a locomotive. He crashed into the radiophone, splintered the delicate instruments and slumped, eyes glazed, to the ground.

He was out. Dead out.

But how much had he got through on the radiophone before being stopped?

Had he told where the rendezvous, was to be? Told the time and place, and warned the Slavs to look for Hay?

Lance sighed, and was conscious that his left eye was

rapidly closing, that a lip was split and his whole body sore. He slung Ranth over his shoulders and trudged wearily back to the base.

He told his story to Colonel Douglas' amazed ears. Ranth, come back to life, was slapped in handcuffs, and for some time the colonel put him through a stern inquisition.

But his lips were sealed. He would not divulge how much he had succeeded in passing on to the Slavs.

"A brave man," Douglas observed grimly when Ranth was carried off to the brig, "but it's death for him, the same as it would be death for Hay were he caught."

"I don't think he had a chance to get much across, sir," Lance said. "I was right on him almost as soon as he got there. You won't let this cancel our rendezvous?"

Douglas' thin lips smiled narrowly. "No. You'll be taking a greater chance, Lance, but we must gamble on how much the Slavs know. You're game, aren't

you?"

"Yes, sir!"

Wednesday night came. Thunderstorms muttered to each other on the lowering horizons; gusts of fierce, wind-driven rain slanted down on the dripping base; occasionally a crooked finger of lightning probed the black sky and lit the whole sopping countryside with a searing, flashing glare.

The night patrol had taken off. A single plane, wet and gleaming under the sobbing heavens, stood on the tarmac, two heavily coated figures before it. Presently three more figures, carrying some bulky black object carefully between them, emerged from one of the buildings. Tenderly they placed this object in the lone plane, which had been stripped of radio outfit and gas bomb compartment to provide room. Then the two original figures were left alone once more before the fighting machine. Far to the rear, the heavy American guns barked in their regular nightly bombardment.

"A good night for it," Colonel Douglas, scanning the

sky, said, "and also a bad one. If only that damned lightning would stop!"

Lance, pulling on thick gloves, did not reply. The colonel consulted his watch.

"What time do you make it?" he asked.

"Exactly eight," the other answered.

"Right. At eight-six, you leave. At nine, on the dot, you meet Hay at Sola Ranch. At nine-ten, the torpedoes take off. At quarter to ten, they arrive over their destination—San Francisco and the surrounding territory. And quarter to ten, if things go correctly—which they must!—is the minute that ends the Slavish invasion of America. At ten minutes to ten, five minutes after the torpedoes strike, our troops charge forward in general attack. God be with you, Lance! The fate of America is resting on your shoulders tonight, remember!"

"I'm remembering."

Colonel Douglas looked at the young man's grim, set face, looked at his lithe, clean-limbed figure and his steady black eyes which burned with a purposeful fire. And the colonel smiled.

"We'll win!" he said.

An orderly sped from his office, saluted, and rapped crisply:

"Order just received from Washington, sir, to proceed."

Lance clasped Douglas' hand, and leaped into the snug, enclosed cockpit. The four motors bellowed as the thin-sprayed oil cascaded to them. The helicopter props spun around.

"Go to it, kid!" cried Douglas. "Spy or no spy, you're coming out on top! And give Hay a last handshake for me!"

And he swung to the salute.

Lance extended his hand. Then he gave his ship the gun, and the tiny, streamlined scout teetered, roared, and rose with a scream into the dripping darkness high above.

The Torpedo Plan had started.

PART IV

Lance hung for a moment at one thousand feet. A crack of lightning lit the base below for a second, and he perceived the colonel's straight figure with hand outstretched. Lance grinned, and gunned to forty thousand—an easy flying height, with his superchargers pumping and air-rectifiers normalizing the enclosed pilot's seat.

"But what," he wondered, as he stopped the helicopters, "did he mean by 'give a *last* handshake'?"

He was soon to find out.

Behind him, in the fuselage, nestled the weird cluster of machinery which was the Singe beacon. It certainly

did not look imposing—a mass of spidery tubes mazing round a bulky black box, which was, Lance guessed, some new type of generator. Out of the top of the device sprouted a funnel-like horn, from which, on the adjustment of the beacon's control studs, shot the nullifying ray. Lance could not suppress a shiver as he thought of the earth-shaking cataclysm that ray would conjure from the infinitely high heavens.

At forty thousand feet he was above the storm clouds, whose pitchy, vapor-drenched blackness effectively blanked out all sign of the earth. He might have been flying in outer space. Keeping a careful eye on his instruments, he set a course for Sola Ranch. He kept his speed around three hundred, wishing to meet Hay exactly at nine.

But—would Hay be there?

How much did the Slavs know? How much had Ranth got through before he stopped him?

A frown creased his brow. It was best not to puzzle over that question. Best just to go ahead, and keep

going.

At about three minutes to nine he set the plane's nose down through veils of clammy cloud. This was mountainous country, sparsely patrolled by Slav ships. Lance hovered cautiously over the firred mountain tops, getting his directions, shooting wary eyes through the magnifying mirrors in search of enemy scouts. He saw none. Satisfied, he cut the Rahl-Diesels, gunned the helicopter props and dropped lightly down on the stubbly field of Sola Ranch.

To left and right loomed the dim outlines of the lonely mountains. Before the war, the owner of Sola Ranch had grown apples; this field had housed a few horses. It made a perfect meeting place—secluded, misty with the clinging mountain vapors, far apart from the war.

Lance felt like a prowling werewolf there, waiting for its ghostly mate.

Rain was still splattering in desultory bursts, but distance muted the rumbling salvos' of thunder. His watch told him it was one minute to nine.

Now—what?

Hay, or a swooping squadron of Slav planes?

Lance stepped out of the cockpit into the rain, though holding himself tensely ready to leap back again and soar away. He stared around, and peered above.

Was that a shadow?—a nightmare flying bird?—or a plane?

He grasped a hand-flash, and rapidly signalled his identity. The next instant, it seemed, the shadow wavered, then fell earthward with great speed.

Out of the gloom and rain it came—an enemy plane.

It dropped down beside his scout. From its cockpit came a few swift flashes of light.

Hay!

Lance ran eagerly over to the other plane, and out from its enclosed cabin stepped the man he had

known as Praed.

Wordlessly, they gripped hands. Hay's thin, straight face wore a smile, and he met Lance's eyes keenly. Lance stammered:

"S-sorry, Captain Hay, about—about the way I treated you at the base. You see, I had no idea who you were."

Hay cut short his apologies with a laugh. "Rot! I'd've been the same way myself." He glanced rapidly at Lance's plane. "Got it?" he questioned. "I'm a bit late; had a hell of a time getting here without arousing suspicion. We'd best hurry."

Lance nodded. They hurried to the Goshawk. As they worked, carefully lifting out the Singe beacon, Lance, in crisp, short-clipped sentences, told his companion of Ranth, the spy.

"You don't know how much he got through?"

"No," said Lance. "No."

"Hm-m. Well, we'll have to trust to luck."

"You know the working of the beacon?" Lance asked. On the other's nod of affirmation he continued: "What's your plan?"

"Light about five miles this side of Frisco itself, just near the main Slav military base. Anywhere in that territory would do, though. The beacon doesn't go up in a narrow ray; it spreads, diffuses. The squadron of torpedoes will cover some fifty or sixty miles of ground, I believe. They'll utterly demolish the city, and every damned Slav in it." His face, in the darkness, went grim and hard. "And it'll damn well pay them back," he rasped, "for the horrible way they massacred San Francisco's population...."

The Singe beacon was in his plane. Hay turned to Lance, stretching out his hand for a farewell clasp. Then Lance asked the question that had been worrying him.

"Colonel Douglas told me to give you a last handshake for him. *Last*. Why did he say that?"

"Because," Hay said smilingly, "I'm staying by the beacon to make sure that nothing goes wrong. I guess that's why he said it, old fellow...."

Lance gasped: "You're sacrificing your life?"

"Of course. To save seventy-five million others."

Then suddenly they both stared above.

A roar of sound—of purring motors, of props, mixed with the chatter of a dozen machine-guns—had belched with numbing suddenness from the low-hanging clouds.

Enemy planes! A patrol of them!

"God!" jerked Lance. "Ranth's warning got through! Part of it, anyway!"

He leaped for his plane, shouting: "I'll hold 'em off! You get away *quick*!" and, through a veritable hail of lead, sprang into the cockpit.

Then, a cold pang at his heart, he sprang out again.

A bullet had caught Hay!

For a moment, the Slav fire ceased, while their planes zoomed up to start another death-dealing dive. And in that moment Lance was at Hay's side, where he had fallen.

"They—got me," whispered Hay, a stream of blood welling from his gasping mouth. "I'm—I'm going. C-carry me to—to your plane. I've still a—a little strength left. You take the beacon. I—I'll hold them—as—as long as—I can. Put through that beacon, boy! *Put it though!*"

His brain a maelstrom, Lance stared at the crumpled figure. It was the only way! He heard the motors above come roaring down again; desperately he carried the blood-choking Hay to his own plane; propped him limply at the controls. Bullets spat through a frenzy of noise. Weakly Hay started the Goshawk's Diesels, and weakly, into Lance's face, smiled, and beckoned him to leave.

And, as Lance, a grim resolve at his heart, turned, Hay's blood-frothed lips formed the words: "Carry on!"

Through the raining lead, seeming to bear a charmed life, Lance leaped to Hay's plane, hearing as he did so his own, with a stricken pilot at its controls, hurtle upwards.

Carry on! For the life of America!

Carry on!

Ten minutes past the hour of nine. A full thousand miles behind the lines, on the wide black field of America's major war base, a small group of men stood, surveying the awesome weapons assembled there.

Row upon row of huge, dully-gleaming cigar-shaped things stretched away into the darkness before them. There were only one or two faint lights to give illumination, and the night choked in on them, making them terrifying.

They resembled, more than anything else, half-sized dirigibles, being roughly about one hundred feet long and perhaps as much as thirty feet high. At first sight, they seemed to be numberless; then, as the bewildered eye became more sane, one could count them and see that there were, in reality, about thirty. Their prows were stubby; in the port side of each a tiny trap-door yawned, and standing by every trap-door was the overall-clad figure of a mechanic, waiting for the signal.

The Commander of the American Air Force looked up from his wrist-watch. At his side was a peculiar gnomelike figure, a figure with hunched, twisted back and huge, over-heavy head. This was Professor Singe, and from that ridiculous head had come the germ which had finally expanded into the torpedoes arrayed before him.

His eyes were nervous; his crooked face twitched ceaselessly. "Time?" he kept asking. "Time? Is it yet time?" And finally the tall figure of the Commanding Officer turned and rapped: "Time!"

An aide-de-camp raised a hand. As if working by some mechanical device, the figure which stood by each torpedo climbed through the trap-doors, jumped out a second later, and came running to the head of the field.

"About thirty seconds," muttered Singe nervously, eyes alight. "Thirty seconds for their motors to catch the stream. Thirty—ah!"

For the squadron of man-made horrors had stirred.

"God pity San Francisco!" murmured the Commanding Officer, and stepped back involuntarily as the whole fleet lifted their glyco-scarzite crammed bellies from the field and, as if moved by some magical, unseen, unheard force, shot up into the darkness with ever gathering speed.

"God pity it, indeed!" chuckled Singe exultantly. "It'll need it!"

The C. O. sighed and shook his head slowly. "War!" he mused. "And yet, it's our only chance." For a moment

he paused, seemingly unconscious of the macabre little form next to him, still gazing aloft at the now invisible torpedoes, and then muttered:

"And God pity Basil Hay, who's giving his life to America—a glorious, unselfish hero. God pity Basil Hay!"

American flyers never knew of Basil Hay's last fight. Had they, it would have become legendary.

For Hay fought a grim battle against two foes. One, he could face and conquer, as he had conquered often before. But the other lurked next to his dauntless heart, and it Hay could not subdue.

It was death.

Truly, Hay's fight there in the wet clouds above Sola Ranch was an inspired one. He fought almost by instinct alone, instinct twenty years of piloting had planted deep in his veins. He fought for Lance—for America. His eyes, glazing rapidly, could not distinguish the roaring phantoms that laced around

his lone plane, but uncannily his bursts of fire went home again and again, while theirs ripped aimlessly over the Goshawk's hell-driven snout.

Of course it could not last. Gallant spirit alone kept Basil Hay taut at his controls. Spirit alone thrust back the ever-increasing surge of black oblivion that pounded at his heart and brain. Spirit alone sent the pitifully outnumbered plane corkscrewing in peerless maneuverings that baffled the on-passing Slavs and thrust four of them to the sodden ground in flame. Spirit that would not surrender—but had to.

They could never have conquered Basil Hay in a plane. An ambushing bullet that caught him off guard did that. And finally Hay fell.

But he had kept them for ten full minutes. Ten minutes—each one a lasting, mute testimony to his unquenchable, unyielding spirit.

He flung a last salvo from his hot machine-guns, then, heart numbing, jerked back the control-stick and careened high. He slumped down. The plane paused,

wallowed crazily for a moment, and then roared earthward, "Carry on!" formed faintly on its dead pilot's bloody lips.

Basil Hay had fought his last fight.

Ten minutes....

Lance hadn't expected that long. He'd thought Hay would die in a few seconds. The man was mortally wounded; could not last.

Nevertheless, minutes or seconds, he was entrusted with the Singe beacon, and it was his job and his will to put it through.

He'd climbed the Slav plane up to its ceiling, driven it till it simply refused to go higher, and then roared on towards San Francisco. Each second he expected to see others come hurtling after him. When they did not, he knew how really great Hay's will was. It was an inspiring example.

But his brain was tortured by a multitude of

conflicting doubts. A patrol of Slav scouts had ambushed them. Just how much did the Slavs know, then, about the torpedoes?

He, Lance, had to guide the Singe beacon. Quickly he reviewed what Hay had told him.

"Light about five miles this side of Frisco. Anywhere in that territory would do, though. The beacon doesn't go up in a narrow ray; it spreads, diffuses."

Spreads, diffuses.

Hay had been clad in Slav uniform, and thus could, with a certain measure of safety, put the beacon machinery on the ground itself. But Lance was in American uniform; if he landed, he ran great risk of being noticed and attacked at once.

Lance saw immediately that there was only one way out. It was sure death, but Hay had expected death, and so must he.

His lips set in stern resolve. It meant good-by—

farewell to the girl he'd left behind, farewell to life, farewell to everything—but not for a second did he debate the course he would take.

Lance glanced at his watch. Nine-thirty. The torpedoes were even now on their way, hurtling along miles above the earth. In fifteen minutes they would be over San Francisco. In fifteen minutes the Singe beacon had to meet them.

He was not familiar with the Slav plane's instruments, but he judged he'd traveled some hundred and twenty-five miles; was nearing the outskirts of San Francisco. The air below would be thick, probably, with enemy scouts, but his appearance should pass unchallenged as long as they didn't glimpse his betraying uniform.

He set the plane's nose down in a long slanting dive.

Whipping through the clouds, the guarding search-rays of San Francisco were soon visible. Lance saw a few patrols of enemy scouts; he clung to the clouds, decreased his speed, and began circling over the

heart of the metropolis itself.

Twenty to ten.

Occasionally a Slav plane flashed by him. Thank God, they didn't challenge! Lance went still lower. Finally, at a thousand feet, he set the helicopter props in motion and hung in mid-air—directly above the very center of the city.

Sixteen minutes to ten.

Now!

In the American front-line trenches, massed troops crouched expectantly. Clustered on every air base were flights of planes, each one crammed with bombs. Far behind, the Yank gun-crews edged nervously up to their mighty charges, and fingered anxiously the stubby gas shells which soon would be flung through the dripping night.

And at Base No. 5 a very uneasy Colonel Douglas paced back and forth in his office, muttering: "No

news from Lance! No news from Lance! God! He can't have failed! But why doesn't he show up?"

He had not failed.

Hovering in the plane over San Francisco Lance squirmed round in his seat, reached back into the fuselage, and pressed rapidly the studs on the Singe beacon. A high whining noise pierced instantly through the plane. And up stabbed the beacon, invisible, deadly—up, up, up to a thin realm miles above, where it flashed into an awesome squadron of terrible shells of steel!

Shells that, a second later, wavered, staggered, and plunged earthward!

And Lance tensed in his seat. From above, he caught a tiny whistling noise—a whistling that hurtled into a terrific shriek—that roared ever closer.

"Carry on!" he muttered. "Carry on!"

The words froze on his lips, for the world was

suddenly consumed, it seemed, by flame and splitting, bellowing thunder.

The American guns spoke.

From every aerodrome long flights of scouts and bombers and transport planes roared upward.

In the front trenches the troops, still somewhat dazed by the earth-shaking explosion that had just tumbled from the far horizon—a horizon still lit by leaping tongues of awful flame—poured over the top, gas-masks on, repeaters and portable machine-guns at the ready, with a fierce cry on their lips.

Before that avenging attack the Slavs, their very spine broken, bewildered and confused, already turning in panic, could not stand.

America swept to the Pacific, and left death in her wake. And when she came to San Francisco, not even the sternest fighting men, still hot from battle, could repress a shudder, so awful was the devastation.

The Slav invasion was over!

In the rebuilt city of San Francisco there is a statue that stands proudly before the magnificent, gleaming city hall.

It represents two slim, straight-standing figures, clad in the uniform of the American Air Force. Their outstretched arms support a tiny one-seater Goshawk fighting plane.

Below, as you know, there is a plaque. Men touch their hats as they walk by it; flowers are always fresh at its base. On the plaque are the words:

To The Everlasting
Memory Of

Captain Basil Hay, A.A.F.
Captain Derek Lance, A.A.F.

Who, In The War Of 1938, Gave
Their Lives In Destroying And
Devastating San Francisco

That San Francisco And America
Might Live

70 The Tentacles from Below, by Desmond Winter Hall

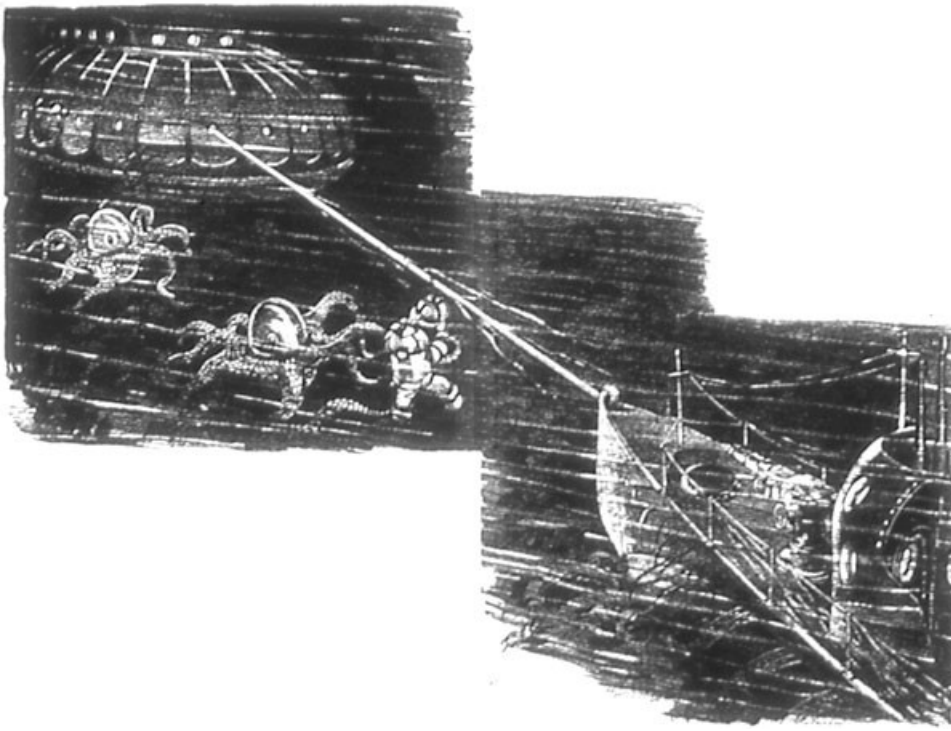
Down to tremendous ocean depths goes Commander Keith Wells in his blind duel with the marauding "machine-fish."

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

on the hawser arm above



- - -

Chapter 1: "*Machine-Fish*"

"Full stop. Rest ready."

These words glowed in vivid red against the black background of the *NX-1*'s control order-board. A wheel was spun over, a lever pulled back, and in the hull of the submarine descended the peculiar silence found only in mile-deep waters. Men rested at their posts, eyes alert.

Above, in the control room, Hemingway Bowman,

youthful first officer, glanced at the televue screen and swore softly.

"Keith," he said, "between you and me, I'll be damned glad when this monotonous job's over. I joined the Navy to see the world, but this charting job's giving me entirely too many close-ups of the deadest parts of it!"

Commander Keith Wells. U. S. N., grinned broadly.

"Well," he remarked, "in a few minutes we can call it a day—or night, rather—and then it's back to the *Falcon* while the day shift 'sees the world.'" He turned again to his dials as Hemmy Bowman, with a sigh, resumed work.

"Depth, six thousand feet. Visibility poor. Bottom eight thousand," he said into the phone hung before his lips, and fifty feet aft, in a small cubby, a blue-clad figure monotonously repeated the observations and noted them down in an official geographical survey report.

Such had been their routine for two tiring weeks, all

part of the *NX-1*'s present work of re-charting the Newfoundland banks.

As early as 1929 slight cataclysms had begun to tear up the sea-floor of this region, and of late—1935—seismographs and cable companies had reported titanic upheavals and sinkings of the ocean bed, changing hundreds of miles of underwater territory. Finally Washington decided to chart the alterations this series of sub-sea earthquakes had wrought.

And for this job the *NX-1* was detailed. A super-submarine fresh from the yards, small, but modern to the last degree, she contained such exclusive features as a sheathing of the tough new glycosteel, automatic air rectifiers, a location chart for showing positions of nearby submarines, the newly developed Edsel electric motors, and automatic televue screen. When below surface she was a sealed tube of metal one hundred feet long, and possessed of an enormous cruising radius. From the flower of the Navy some thirty men were picked, and in company with the mother-ship *Falcon* she put out to combine an exhaustive trial trip with the practical charting of the

newly changed ocean floor.

Now this work was almost over. Keith Wells told himself that he, like Bowman, would be glad to set foot on land again. This surveying was important, of course, but too dry for him—no action. He smiled at the lines of boredom on Hemmy's brow as the younger man stared gloomily into the televue screen.

And then the smile left his lips. The radio operator, in a cubby adjoining the control room, had spoken into the communication tube:

"Urgent call for you, sir! From Captain Knapp!"

Wells reached out and clipped a pair of extension phones over his ears. The deep voice of Robert Knapp, captain of the mother-ship *Falcon*, came ringing in. It was strained with an excitement unusual to him.

"Wells? Knapp speaking. Something damned funny's just happened near here. You know the fishing fleet that was near us yesterday morning?"

"Yes?"

"Well, the whole thing's gone down! Destroyed, absolutely! The sea's been like glass, the weather perfect—yet from the wreckage, what there is of it, you'd think a typhoon had struck! I can't begin to explain it. No survivors, either, so far, though we're hunting for them."

"You say the boats are completely destroyed?"

"Smashed like driftwood. I tell you it's preposterous—and yet it's the fact. I think you'd better return at once, old man; you're only half an hour off. And come on the surface; it's getting light now, and you might pick up something. God knows what this means, Keith, but it's up to us to find out. It's—it's got me...."

His tones were oddly disturbed—almost scared—and this from a man who didn't know what fear was.

"But Bob," Keith asked, "how did you—"

"Stand by a minute! The lookout reports survivors!"

Wells turned to meet Bowman's inquisitive face. He quickly repeated the gist of Knapp's weird story. "We saw them at dusk, last evening—remember? And now they're gone, destroyed. What can have done it?"

For some minutes the two surprised men speculated on the strange occurrence. Then Knapp's voice again rang in the headphones.

"Wells? My God, man, this is getting downright fantastic! We've just taken two survivors on board; one's barely alive and the other crazy. I can't get an intelligible thing from him; he keeps shrieking about writhing arms and awful eyes—and monsters he calls 'machine-fish'!"

"You're sure he's insane?"

Robert Knapp's voice hesitated queerly.

"Well, he's shrieking about 'machine-fish'—fish with machines over them!... I—I'm going to broadcast the whole story to the land stations. 'Machine-fish'! I don't know.... I don't know.... You'd better hurry back,

Wells!"

He rang off.

Keith slipped off the headphones and told Bowman what he had learned. Hardy, staunchly built craft, those fishing boats were; born in the teeth of gales. What horror could have ripped them—all of them—to driftwood, with the weather perfect? And a half-mad survivor, raving about "machine-fish"!

"Such things are preposterous," Bowman commented scornfully.

"But—the fleet's gone, Hemmy," Keith replied.

"Anyway, we'll speed back, and see what it's all about."

He punched swift commands on the control studs. "Empty Tanks, Zoom to Surface, Full Speed," the crimson words glared down below, and the *NX-1* at once shoved her snout up, trembling as her great electric motors began their pulsing whine. The delicate fingers of the massed dials before Keith

danced exultantly. The depth-levels tolled out:

"Seven thousand ... six thousand ... five thousand—"

"Keith! Look there!"

Hemmy Bowman was pointing with amazement at the location chart, a black mesh screen that showed the position of other submarines within a radius of two miles. In one corner, a spot of vivid red was shining.

"But it can't be a submarine!" Wells objected. "Our reports would have mentioned it!"

The two officers stared at each other.

"Machine-fish!" Bowman whispered softly. "If there were machines, the metal would register on the chart."

"It must be them!" the commander roared, coming out of his daze. "And, by God, we're going after them!"

Rapidly he brought the *NX-1* out of her zoom to the surface, and left her at four thousand feet, in perfect trim, while he read the instruments closely.

A green spot in the center of the location chart denoted the *NX-1*'s exact position. A distance of perhaps forty inches separated it from the red light on the meshed screen—which represented, roughly, a mile and a half. Below the chart was a thick dial, over which a black hand, indicating the mysterious submersible's approximate depth, was slowly moving.

"He's sinking—whatever he is," Keith muttered to Hemmy. "Hey, Sparks! Get me Captain Knapp."

A moment later the connection was put through.

"Bob? This is Wells again. Bob, our location chart shows the presence of some strange undersea metallic body. It can't be a submarine, for my maritime reports would show its presence. We think it has some connection with the 'machine-fish' that survivor raved about. At any rate, I'm going after it. The world has a right to know what destroyed that

fishing fleet, and since the *NX-1* is right on the spot it's my duty to track it down. Re-broadcast this news to land stations, will you? I'll keep in touch with you."

Knapp's voice came soberly back. "I guess you're right, Keith; it's up to you.... So long, old man. Good luck!"

In Wells' veins throbbed the lust for action. With control studs at hand, location chart and televue screen before his eyes and fifteen men waiting below for his commands, he had no fear of any monster the underseas might spew up. He glanced swiftly at the location chart and depth indicator again.

The mysterious red spot was slowly coming across the *NX-1*'s bows at a distance of about one mile. Keith punched a stud, and, as his craft filled her tank and slipped down further into deep water, he spoke to Hemmy Bowman.

"Take control for a minute. Keep on all speed, and follow 'em like a bloodhound. I'm going below."

He strode down the connecting ramp to the lower deck, where he found fifteen men standing vigilantly at posts. At once Keith plunged into a full explanation of what he had learned up in the control room. He concluded:

"A great moral burden rests on us—every one of us—as we will soon come face to face with a possible world menace. Anything may happen. A state of war exists on this submarine. You will be prepared for any wartime eventuality!"

Sobered faces greeted this announcement, and perceptibly the men straightened and held themselves more alertly. Wells at once returned to the control room. A glance at the location chart and its two tiny lights told him that the intervening distance had been decreased to about half a mile.

The depth dial showed them both to be two miles below, and steadily diving lower. Charts showed the sea-floor to be three miles deep in this position, and that meant—

"Look there!" exclaimed the first officer suddenly. "It's changing course!"

The crimson stud had suddenly shifted its course, and now was fleeing directly before them. For a moment the distance between the green and red lights remained constant—and then Keith Wells stared unbelievably at the chart, wiped a hand across his eyes and stared again.

"Why—why, the devils are as fast as we!" he exclaimed in amazement. "I think they're even gaining on us!"

"And there's no other submarine in the world that can do more than thirty under water!" Hemmy Bowman added. "We're hitting a full forty-one!"

A call came through the communication tube from Sparks. "Report from Consolidated Radio News-Broadcasters, sir, aimed especially at us."

"Well?" asked Keith, motioning Hemmy to listen in. Sparks read it.

"A week ago Atlantic City reported that seven men were snatched off fishing boat by unidentified tentacled monsters. Testimony of witnesses was discredited, but was later corroborated by the almost identical testimony of other witnesses at Brighton Beach, England, who saw man and woman taken by mysterious monsters whilst bathing.' Perhaps these same creatures destroyed the Newfoundland fishing fleet." His level voice ceased.

"Tentacled monsters ... 'machine-fish,'" Wells murmured slowly. "'Machine-fish.'..."

Their eyes met, the same wonder in each. "Well," Keith rapped at last, "we're seeing this through!"

He turned again to the location chart. The green spot as always was in the center, and at a constant distance was the red, showing that the *NX-1* was hot on the other's trail. The depth dials indicated that both were diving deeper every moment.

"Where in hell's it going?" the commander rasped. "We'll be on the floor in a few minutes!"

Here the televue showed the world to be one of fantasy, one to which the sun did not exist. It was not an utter, pitchy blackness that pervaded the water, but rather a peculiar, dark blueness. No fish schools, Keith noted, scurried from them. They had already left these waters; aware, perhaps, of the passing Terror....

They plunged lower yet. Wells was conscious of Hemmy Bowman's quick, uneven breathing. Conscious of the tautness of his own nerves, strung like quivering violin strings. Conscious of the terrific walls of water pressing in on them. And conscious of the men below, their lives bound implicitly in his will and brain....

A thought came to him, and quickly he reached into a rack for the chart of the local sea-floor. His brow creased with puzzlement as he studied it.

"Here's more mystery, Hemmy," he muttered. "Look—there's an underwater cliff about half a mile dead ahead. It rises to within four thousand feet of the surface. And that thing out there is charging straight

into its base!"

"They must be aware of it," jerked the other. "See?—they've stopped!"

It was true. The gulf between the two colored spots was rapidly being swallowed up. At a pulsing forty-one knots the *NX-1* was closing in on the motionless mystery craft.

"They're sinking to the floor itself," observed Wells. "Perhaps waiting to attack."

The invisible beams from their ultra-violet light-beacons streamed through the silent gloom outside, yet still the televue screen was empty. Keith punched a stud, and the *NX-1*'s whining motors dulled to a scarcely audible purr.

"What is the thing?" muttered Hemmy Bowman. "God, Keith, what *is* it?"

For answer, the commander dropped them the last five hundred feet. The sea-floor rose like a gray ghost.

More control studs were pushed; the order-board below read: "All Power Off, Rest in Trim." The location chart told a tale that wrung a gasp from Bowman's throat. The red and green lights were practically touching....

The hands of Petty Officer Brown, the helmsman, were quivering on the helm. Wells' fists kept tensing and relaxing as he peered for a sight of the enemy in the televue. Nothing showed but the moving fingers of spectral kelp. Then both he and Bowman cried out as one:

"There!"

Chapter 2: The Silent Ray

A strange shape had suddenly materialized on the screen—an immense, oval-shaped thing of dull metal, with great curving cuts of glass-like substance in its blunt bow, like staring eyes; a lifeless, staring thing, stretching far into the curtain of gloom behind. How long it was, Keith could not tell; at first his numb brain refused to grasp it and reduce it to definite, sane standards of size and length. The cold weeds of the sea-floor kelp beds swayed eerily over and around it. From its bow, he saw, peculiar knobs jutted, the function of which he guessed with dread.

Was it waiting with a purpose? Was it waiting—and inviting attack?

A frightened whisper from Hemmy Bowman broke the hush:

"Keith, the thing has ports, but shows no lights! What kind of creatures can they be?"

As he spoke, the three men in the control room felt

the unmistakable, jarring tingle of an electric shock. And while their nerves still jumped, it came again; and again. They were conscious of a slight feeling of drowsiness.

Keith gaped at Bowman and Brown, and then a flash on the televue screen drew his eyes. There, against the blackness of its otherwise inanimate hulk, one of the jutting knobs on the bow of the mysterious submarine was glowing and pulsing with orange life! With it came the tingling shock again. It flicked off as they watched, then returned and went once more.

"They're attacking, but thank God the shock was harmless!" Wells said grimly. "All right; they've asked for it: I'm going to see how they like the taste of a torpedo!"

The two submarines were resting on the ocean floor with perhaps two hundred feet between them. The *NX-1*'s bow tubes were not exactly in line to score a direct hit; she would have to be maneuvered slightly to port. The range was short; the explosion from the torpedoes would be titanic.

Keith punched the control studs, ordering the men below to assume firing stations. Then, while waiting for the *NX-1* to shift, he studied the televue screen to sight the range exactly. The black dot which represented the enemy craft was not directly on the crossed hair-lines of the dial-like range-finder, but shifting the *NX-1* a few feet would bring it to the perfect firing point.

But the *NX-1* did not budge.

Surprised, her commander swung and looked at Bowman. "What the devil?" he cried. "Did that shock —?" He left the dread thought unfinished and leaped to the speaking tubes.

"Craig! Jones! Wetherby!" he yelled. "Men! Don't you hear me? Aren't you—"

He broke off, wordless, waiting for an answer that did not come, then sprang to the connecting ramp and ran to the deck below.

The scene he found halted him abruptly in his tracks.

Every member of the crew was sprawled on the deck, in grotesque, limp postures. They had been standing rigidly at posts, he saw, when the thing, whatever it was, had struck. Without a sound, without a single cry of alarm, the *NX-1*'s crew had been laid low!

The commander slowly advanced to the deck and stared more closely at the upturned faces around him. He saw that every man's eyes were open.

Bending over one still form, he pressed his hand on the heart. It was beating! The man was alive!

Amazed, he moved to another and another: they were all breathing, slowly and regularly—were all alive! A curious look in their eyes staggered him for a moment. He could swear that they recognized him, knew he was staring at them—for every single pair was alight with intelligence, and Keith fancied he saw gleams of recognition.

"It must have been a paralyzing ray!" he gasped. "A thing our scientists've been trying to develop for years.... And that monster outside knows the secret...." He lifted an arm of the inert figure at his

feet; when he released the grip, it flopped limply back to the deck again.

"Keith! Come back, quick!"

Startled, the commander turned to find Hemingway Bowman at the top of the connecting ramp, his face distorted with alarm.

"For God's sake, come back quick!" he yelled again.
"Down there the ray might get you!"

With the words, Wells leaped to the ramp and raced to the control room. He had no sooner made it than he felt again the queer tingle of the electric charge. He found himself trembling. Bowman's face was white. His words came stuttering.

"One second later and they'd have got you.... They got Sparks in his cubby.... You see, the ray doesn't affect us in the control room because—"

"Because the Gibson insulation that protects the instruments keeps it out!" Keith finished grimly. "I

see!"

Just then a slight jar ran through the submarine. Coincident with it came a cry from Brown, the helmsman. His arm was pointed at the televue.

There they saw the enemy's mighty dirigible of metal was now within thirty feet of the *NX-1*. It had crept up silently, without warning. And, spanning the short gulf between them, an arm of webbed metal craned from the other's huge bow, hooking tightly into the American submarine's forward hawser holes!

As they took this in, the enemy ship moved away and the arm of metal tightened. The *NX-1* shuddered. And, at first slowly, but with ever increasing speed, she got under way and slid after her captor. They were being towed away. Kidnaped! Men, submarine and all!

Keith Wells mopped sweat from a hot brow and rapidly reviewed his weapons. He was sorely restricted. Through an emergency system the *NX-1* could be propelled and maneuvered from her control room; but the torpedo tubes needed local attendance.

"Hemmy, reverse engines," he jerked, himself spinning over a small wheel. "Let's see if we can out-pull the devil!"

At once they felt the shock of the paralyzing ray, and then the surging whine of the Edsel electrics pulsed up and in the televue screen they watched the grim struggle of ship against ship.

Imperceptibly, almost, as her screws cut in and churned, the forward progress of the *NX-1* was slowing, the speed of the other being cut down, until finally they but barely forged ahead. Slowly, ever so slowly they were out-pulled; inch by inch they were dragged ahead. Their motors could not hold even.

"She's more powerful than we!" Wells' bitter voice spoke. "Damn!" He thought desperately, while Bowman and Brown stared at the fantastic tale the televue spelled out.

Again the paralyzing shock tingled, an intangible jailer that bound them, more surely than steel bars, to the control room. To dare that streaming barrage

meant instant impotence, and perhaps, later, death....

"Our two bow torpedoes," Keith mused slowly. "We're a bit close, but it's our only chance. The ray comes at intervals of about a minute; the torps are ready for firing. If one of us could dash forward and discharge 'em.... Brown, that's you!"

The petty officer met his commander's gaze levelly. He smiled. "Yes, sir, I'm ready!" he said.

"Good! It'll have to be quick work, though; I'll try and keep the sub pointed straight. Wait for the ray, then run like hell!"

The first officer took over the helm and Brown stepped to the forward ladder, waiting for the periodic ray to be discharged.

The odd tingle came and vanished. "Now!" Wells roared, and Brown leaped down the thin steel rungs.

He staggered at the bottom from the force of his impact, then straightened and raced madly forward.

Through the drone of the motors the two officers could hear the staccato beat of his feet.

But their eyes were glued to the televue. Through clutching beds of seaweed the enemy submarine was ploughing. Her great, smooth bow lay straight ahead, metal hawser arm spanning the thirty feet between them. In another second, Keith thought grimly, two dynamite packed tubes of sudden death would thunderbolt into that hull, and—

Brown pulled the lever.

The tubes spat out compressed air; a scream ran through the submarine; and the two steel fish leaped from their sheaths, their tiny props roaring. Over the narrow gulf they shot; the range was short, their target dead ahead—and yet by bare inches they missed!

No answering roar bellowed back. Keith had watched their course; had seen them flash by the enemy's bow, flicking it with their rudders, but nothing more.

"Why?" he cried. And, as Bowman moved his hands in

a hopeless gesture, he saw in the televue the reason.

It was a jagged pinnacle of rock, which, just before Brown had fired, had been straight ahead. The towing monster had seen it and veered sharply to avoid crashing. The barest change of course, yet sufficient to avoid the torpedoes....

Wells and Bowman were cursing savagely when the sound of Brown, racing desperately aft, jerked the commander to the ladder. He saw the petty officer at its foot. "Hurry!" Wells shouted. "The ray!"

Brown grasped the steel rungs and scrambled upward, but he was too late. The fatal charge tingled. A peculiar, surprised expression washed over his face; his hands loosened their grip. For a second his eyes looked questioningly at his commander; a faint sigh escaped him; and then his arms flung out, his body relaxed, and he slumped like a slab of meat to the deck below....

Keith Wells saw red. Blind to everything, he was just about to charge down the ladder to himself re-load

the forward tubes when the grip of Hemmy Bowman's hand stayed him. The thing Hemmy was staring at in the televue screen sobered him completely.

The wall of rock to which the enemy submarine had first been charging had become visible, soaring vastly from the gloom of the sea-floor. And the monster was towing them straight into a dark, jagged cleft at its base.

"It's a cavern!" Keith breathed. "A split in the rock—the lair of that devil. And we're being dragged into it!"

Chapter 3: Sacrifice

At that moment Keith Wells knew fear. Each second they were being hauled closer to the monster's dim lair. It lay there, dark, mysterious, fingered by gently swaying, clammy kelp. A hushed solitude seemed to reign over it, aweing all undersea life from the vicinity.... Wells turned his head to meet Bowman's eyes, and read in them a silent question.

What now?

He groaned in the agony of his mind. In a few minutes, all would be over. Once the *NX-1* was dragged into that dark cavern there'd be no chance of escaping to warn the world above, of saving the submarine. What now? The question brought beads of sweat to his tormented brow. He, Keith Wells, standing impotently by while his ship, the pride of the service, was hauled inch by inch to some strange doom!

Racked by these thoughts, he murmured tortured, jerky phrases, unconscious he was giving voice to the

things that flogged his brain.

"What can I do? I've got to save my ship—I've got to get back to break the news—I've got to tell the world! But how? How—" His expression changed suddenly. "That's it! That hawser arm between us must be broken!"

"Yes."

First Officer Hemingway Bowman's clear voice broke in on the older man's thoughts with that one crisp word. Keith swung to find the other's eyes fixed levelly on his.

"You're right, Keith. The hawser arm must be broken; with a depth charge, of course. It's the only way.

"To attach a depth charge," he continued evenly, "a man must leave the ship. You can't, Keith. It will be me."

The commander did not speak. "I'll put on a sea-suit," Hemmy went on quickly, eyes lighting. "You tip the

submarine and I'll slide out the conning tower exit port on the lee side, so they can't see me, and worm forward through the kelp. We're almost holding them even; that'll be easy. I'll be protected from the paralyzing shock until the last second, and it may not get me outside; that'll have to be chanced. The hawser arm's only some ten feet above the sea-floor; I can reach it with a hook on the charge." He paused.

"I'll attach it; and when it bursts I'll try to get back and grab that ring on the midships exit port, and you can let me in when we get to the surface. But if I take too long, Keith—if I miss—you beat it without me. You understand? Beat it!"

He gazed straight at his friend. "Understand, Keith?"

Commander Keith Wells bowed his head in acquiescence. He was afraid that if he met Hemmy Bowman's steady eyes he'd make a fool of himself....

Hemmy glanced at the screen once more, shivering as he saw how near the black cavern was. Then he moved rapidly, playing the cards carefully for his

gamble with death. He had to: the trumps were in the other hand.

From the locker where their sea-suits were stowed he grabbed his own, and with quick fingers ripped the slides and fitted it on. A sheath of yellow Lestofabrik, its weighted feet and gleaming casque transformed his slim figure into a giant such as might stalk through a nightmare. Built cunningly into the helmet was a tiny radio transmitter and receiver, with a range of a quarter-mile; hugging to the shoulders, inside nestled the air-making mechanism, its tiny generators already in motion. Around the helmet was fastened a small removable undersea-light. The wrists of the suit were very flexible, permitting the freest motion.

Once in the suit, Hemmy smiled through the still-opened face-shield.

"Got the depth charge ready, Keith? Make it fast—that cavern's near!... Good!"

Silently the commander fitted the black bomb to his

friend's shoulders. It was timed to fire a minute after being set. A long wire hook craned from its top, and this hook Bowman would fasten on the hawser arm.

"Without Sparks, I guess I'll have to communicate with you through portable," Keith said, and quickly donned one of the tiny portable sets.

"Right. Ready, Keith."

Bowman started his awkward, crawling progress up the ladder into the conning tower just above, Keith helping from behind. When they stood before the exit port on the lee side, Wells shot back its bolts and the door swung open, revealing the black emptiness of the water chamber. The commander gazed for a second into Bowman's eyes. The moment had come.

Keith turned his head away, felt a hand grip his. He wrung it tightly....

Bowman clumped into the chamber.

The commander closed and locked the door, and he

heard the streaming water pour in as Hemmy turned the valve. Then Wells sped down the ladder and tilted the diving and course rudders of the submarine.

She swayed daintily over to port; held there. A moment later the recurring electric tingle brushed him. Had the enemy seen Bowman leave? Had the ray struck him down?

He glared into the teleview. "Thank God!" he breathed. For Hemmy had already slid down the *NX-1*'s smooth hull and was safe on the sea-floor beside her.

"Everything right?" Wells asked, speaking into the microphone of his portable.

"All O.K.," came the answer. "Going forward now. Kelp thick as hell."

Keith's eyes bored at the screen. This misshapen monster who was his friend! Almost obscured by bands of thick-leaved kelp the yellow form moved, hands clearing a pathway through the weeds. Slowly

but surely he made for the bow of the submersible.

"Hard going, Keith. God—the cavern's right ahead!"

It was ghostly to hear Hemmy's warm voice from the lifeless solitude outside. Breath coming quickly, Wells watched the silent scene—the cleft in the wall of rock overshadowing everything now. The diver fought ahead, gaining inch by inch.

Now, save for occasional clumps of weed, he was exposed to the enemy.... Now the last desperate gauntlet was reached.... Keith felt his blood pound hotly.

"I'm gaining, Keith. Gaining...."

Bowman had little breath for speech. His tiny form battled on, now sinking from sight as he dropped into some masked gully, now wrestling slowly with great swaying strands of kelp, but always struggling ahead.

"I'm at the bow, Keith! The hawser arm's right in our mooring holes. I'll go halfway before fastening the

charge. Any signs of life from the devil?"

"None yet, Hemmy. But go slow. Hide all you can, old man, for God's sake!..."

Right beneath the metal arm, Bowman's dwarfed figure crept doggedly ahead. Forward, inch by breathless inch. Kelp thickened, washed away; the two hulking submersibles, captor and captive, surged onward—but just a little faster went the valiant figure with the black charge on its back.

The towing monster had its snout in the cavern. The darkness thickened. Bowman was quarter way!

He plunged desperately. Half way!

"I'm there, Keith! Now for it!"

"Oh, God!" Wells cried. "They see you; they're coming!"

For he had seen strange shapes leaving the enemy submarine.

And at that same moment, Bowman saw them, too.

They came like the blink of a dark eye from a door that had quickly slid open in the mysterious ship's bow. As tall as a man they were, and there were two of them, though at first the nature of their bodies merged with the wreathing kelp made them seem like a dozen. Bowman stared at them, hypnotized with fear. His legs and arms went dead, and his whole gallant spirit seemed to slump into lifeless clay. Now he knew why the fishermen had shrieked "machine-fish." Each one of them had eight tapering arms, eight restless tentacles. These were octopi, most hideous scavengers of the ocean floor! And not only octopi—but octopi sheathed in metal-scaled armor!

As they came closer, he realized this preposterous fact. The dark substance of their writhing tentacles was not flesh: it was a coat of metal scales. And the fat central mass which held their eyes and vital organs and beaked jaw—this mass was completely enveloped by a globe of glass. From inside, he could see great eyes staring at him. The monsters came towards him quite slowly, obviously wary, advancing

over the sea-floor in what was a hideous mockery of walking, their forward tentacles outstretched.

With a sob, Hemmy Bowman pulled himself from his trance. He glanced back at the *NX-1*. He still had time to retreat. He might be able to get back inside before these monsters seized him.

But that meant abandoning his job. And already his own submarine was nosing into the cavern. The choice between the octopi and retreat stared him in the face. He pulled himself together and jerked his arms back to action.

Eyes bulging, Keith Wells peered at the dim televue screen. He saw the creatures approaching Hemmy. And then, suddenly, he remembered his radiophone.

"Hemmy! Come back, for God's sake!" he cried.

"Come back while you can—it's hopeless!"

But Bowman had already seized the depth charge from his back and hooked it on the hawser arm above.

Immediately, with that action, all caution fled from the approaching monsters. Their tentacles whipped furiously; and in a great arc they sprang for the tiny figure of the diver.

With a deep breath, Hemmy staggered forward to meet them. "Keith!" he gasped. "I'll try to hold 'em away from the charge! When it bursts, zoom! Zoom like hell to the surface!" And then the tentacles had him.

Keith watched, cursing his impotence to help. Hemmy had no weapon; he was trying to hold them back by the weight of his body; he reached out and grasped a tentacle and hugged it to him, shoving forward with all his puny strength. But all his effort was as nothing. One of the octopi writhed past him and darted onto the depth charge. Its tentacles tugged at the bomb; pulled furiously.

The time charge exploded. The *NX-1* rocked like a quivering reed; Wells was knocked violently to the floor; a vast roar smote his ear-drums. When he staggered to his feet he found that the octopus that

was pulling at the charge had disappeared—blown into fragments of flesh and metal. But the hawser arm was broken! The *NX-1*, free, shot back a full fifty feet under the pull of her reversed screws. A cry echoed in her commander's ears:

"Go back, Keith! Go like hell!"

He saw the remaining octopus lift Bowman and whip to the exit port of its submarine. The lid slid into place, closing on the monster and his friend, and the enemy ship vanished into the black cavern....

Once clear of the opening, Keith set his motors full forward and brought the diving rudders up. Quickly the ship sped from the haunted sea-floor to the sun-warmed surface. A last thin call rang in his radiophone:

"They've got me inside, Keith. It's dark, and filled with water. I can't see anything, but I—I guess we're going through the cavern.... Forget about me, old boy. So long! So—"

The voice was abruptly cut off.

Keith ripped the instrument from his head. Then, face white and drawn, he ran to the radio cubby. Standing over Sparks' inert body, he put through a call to Robert Knapp, on the *Falcon*.

"Knapp?" he said harshly. "This is Wells. I'll be with you in a few minutes. Yes—yes—I'll tell you the whole story later. But get this now: Have the day shift all ready to take over the submarine by the time I pull alongside."

He said no more just then; but rang off, and, looking back, he muttered savagely:

"But I'll be back, Hemmy—I'll be back!"

Chapter 4: In the Cavern

"That's the story, Knapp. They got Bowman, and I had to run away. Their ship disappeared into the cavern. I've got a hunch, though, that it's not just a cavern, but a tunnel, leading through to some underwater world. That series of sub-sea earthquakes probably opened it up; and now these devil-octopi are free to pour out. I've *got* to find out what's what, and that's why I'm going down again as soon as the torpedo system's ready!"

Keith and Robert Knapp were in the *Falcon's* chart room. On the table before them lay a broad white map with a cross-mark indicating the position of the mysterious dark cavern.

Wells was striding up and down like a caged tiger in his impatience to be off. Every other minute he glared down to where the *NX-1* lay alongside. On her conning tower stood the tall blond-haired figure of Graham, the first officer of the day shift, supervising the final details of the work of installing a system of jury controls whereby the submarine's torpedoes

could be fired from her control room.

Keith stopped short and faced Knapp. "It won't be so one-sided this time, Bob," he promised. "You see: when the location chart shows the enemy ship, I'll rush all men into the control room, where the paralyzing ray can't harm them. I don't know but what they have in other weapons, but I'm gambling on getting my torps in first. They've killed Bowman; they've ravaged a whole fishing fleet; they're free to emerge from their hole and maraud every ocean on the globe! They've got to be stopped! And since I'm armed and have the only submarine on the spot, I've got to do it! I know how to fight them now!"

Captain Robert Knapp's sense of things was badly disordered. He had just heard a story which his common sense told him couldn't be true, but which the evidence of his eyes had grimly authenticated. He had seen fifteen men slung aboard his ship from the *NX-1's* silent hull; men stretched in grotesque, limp attitudes; men struck down by a paralyzing ray. Why, no nation on earth had developed rays for warfare! Yet—a crew of helpless men was even then in the sick

bay, receiving attention in the hope that they might recover.

"You're going right through that cavern, then, Wells?" he asked incredulously. "You're going to investigate what lies beyond?"

"Nothing else! And I won't come out till I've blown that octopi ship to pieces!"

"It sounds preposterous," Knapp murmured, shaking his head. "Octopi, you say—and clad in metal suits! Running a submarine more powerful than the *NX-1*! Armed with a ray—a paralyzing ray! I can't believe—I can't conceive—"

"You've seen the men!... Knapp, if I were you I'd swing my eight-inchers out, bring up the plane catapult and keep the deck torpedo tubes loaded and ready. It's best to be prepared; God knows what's going on underseas these days!"

First Officer Graham appeared at the door. "Work finished, sir," he said. "Ready to cast off."

"Thank heaven!" Wells muttered, and stretched out his hand to Robert Knapp. "Broadcast what I've told you, Bob, and say that the *NX-1* won't be back till everything's under control. I'll keep in touch with you. So long!" And he was gone before the captain could even wish him good luck.

Orders raced from her commander's fingers on the stud board in the control room. "Crash Dive" filled her tanks and put her nose perilously down, so that in thirty seconds only a swirling patch of water was left to show where once she'd lain. A brief command to the helmsman and she pointed straight for the dark cavern marked on the chart.

When well under way, Keith descended with Graham to inspect the new torpedo firing system, and found it in good working order. "Graham," he ordered tersely, "instruct the crew fully about rushing to the control room on one ring of the general alarm. And send the cook up to me in a minute or so. I'll be in Sparks' cubby."

Above again, he instructed the radio man to rig a

remote control sender and receiver in the insulated control room. The need for centering the whole crew there during engagements would crowd the room awkwardly, but at other times, while proceeding on their inspection of the cavern lair, they could remain at their regular posts.

That, at least, was Wells' plan.

He looked up and found the cook, McKegnie, grinning at him from the door of the control room. Keith smiled, running his eyes over the portly magnificence of his gently perspiring figure. "Keg," he said cheerfully, "I want you to move your hot plate and culinary apparatus up here; you see, we're all likely to be crowded in here for some time, and your coffee's going to be an absolute necessity." He couldn't resist a crack at McKegnie's well-known and passionate curiosity as to what made the thigmajigs of the control board work: "And besides, it'll give you a chance to observe the instruments and perfect yourself for your future career as a naval officer. Much better than a correspondence course in 'How to Be a Submarine Commander,' eh?"

Cook McKegnie grinned sheepishly, and left. He was well used to such jests, but he never would admit that his extraordinary interest in watching the ship's wheels go round was accompanied by a miraculous inability to comprehend why they went round....

Fifteen minutes later the helmsman's cry, "Cavern showing, sir!" swung the commander to the televue screen. The dark, kelp-shrouded opening he knew so well was already looming on it. And he was prepared.

"Enter," he said, while his punched studs ordered, "Quarter Speed, Ready at Posts, Tanks in Trim." The *NX-1* slackened her gait, balanced cautiously, and struck a straight, even course as she crept closer to the cleft entrance through which, some two hours earlier, the octopi ship had nosed.

Screws turning slowly, she edged through the jagged cavern. Shades of inky blackness grew on the televue and danced in fantastic blotches; the screen turned to a welter of black, threatening shadows; became a useless maze of ever-changing forms. Keith mouthed curses as he stared at it; he now had nothing

by which to judge his progress, to maneuver the submarine, save directional instruments and, perhaps, chance scrapings of the tunnel's ragged walls against the outer hull. The *NX-1* was running a gauntlet of immeasurable danger, her only assurance of success being the fact that a larger craft had preceded her.

But how far, Keith wondered, had that ship preceded her? How was he to know that it had gone straight through? There might be a dozen different turnings in this tunnel: the submarine could easily tilt head-on against a jagged rock and puncture her hull. There might be mines planted directly in their course; he might be swimming straight into some hideous ambush.

He drove these thoughts from his mind. The passage had to be made on the fickle authority of the senses; and, realizing this, Wells took the helm into his own hands. Graham was posted at the location chart, with instructions to report the red light if it showed.

Down below, the Edsel electrics were humming very

softly; the men stood vigilantly at posts. On their brows were little beads of sweat, and here and there a hand clenched nervously. All knew they were in a tight place; otherwise they were ignorant of where their commander was leading them. Occasionally a long, shivering rasp ran through the ship as her hull nudged the rough tunnel wall. Then the course rudders would swing gently over; and perhaps, almost immediately, another grinding cry of rock and steel would come from the other side. Then would come quickly indrawn breaths as the rudders swung again and the humming silence droned on.

The scrapings came quite often. Often, too, the motors would go silent altogether, and the *NX-1* would rest almost motionless as her commander felt for an opening. It was a tense, nerve-wringing ordeal. The silence, the waiting, the dainty scrapings were maddening.

Keith Wells' skin was prickling. He kept only fingertips on the tiny helm: he was playing that uncanny sixth sense of the submarine commander. When it misled him, the rasping rock groaned out,

scarring the submarine's smooth skin. Generally, the tunnel was straight; but each time he heard his ship rub against some exterior obstruction, his teeth went tight—for who knew but what it might be a mine?

They had penetrated perhaps a half-mile when Graham, eyes steady on the televue, reported: "Light growing, sir!"

Wells saw that the screen was filling with a soft, faintly glowing bluish color. The walls of the tunnel became visible, and he noted that they were widening out, funnel-like. He dared to increase speed slightly. Three minutes later he saw that the blue illumination was seeping from the end of the tunnel. They continued out.

"Thank God, we're through!" he muttered to Graham. "You see, I was right! It's an underground sea—and we're at the top of it." For the instruments indicated a depth beneath them of roughly three miles. They were in, evidently, a large cavern, of vast length and depth.

The *NX-1* continued slowly forward, two pairs of eyes intent on her televue screen. Keith jotted down the tunnel's position, and the funnel-shaped hole sank away behind their slow screws. And then, upon the location chart, a faint red dot suddenly glowed!

It was upon them in a flash. A small tube of metal, shaped somewhat in the form of the big octopi submarine, had darted up from below, hovered a second close to them, and then, almost before they realized they were being surveyed, sped back into the mysterious depths from which it had come.

"A lookout, I suppose," Keith muttered, breathing more easily. "Couldn't have held more than two of those creatures.... Well, the alarm's out, I guess, Graham, but it can't be helped. Let's see what it's like down below."

They plunged steadily down, then ahead. And presently there grew on the televue vague forms which widened their eyes and made their breath come quicker. Keith had guessed the tunnel led to a civilization of some kind, but he was not prepared for

the sight that loomed hazily through the soft blue water.

Strange, moundlike shapes appeared far below, mounds grouped in orderly rows and clusters, with streets running between them, thronged with tiny, spidery dots. Octopi! It was, the commander realized, a city of the monsters—a complete city like those of surface peoples! For several miles in every direction the water-city spread out, farther than the televue could pierce. Wells marveled at this separately developed civilization, this deep-buried realm of octopi whose unexpected intellectual powers had permitted such development. Perhaps, he pondered, this city was only one of many; perhaps only a village. He could but vaguely glimpse the queer mound buildings, but saw that they were of varying height and were filled with dark round entrance holes, through which the creatures streamed on their different errands....

He saw no schools of fish around. "I guess they've been all killed off, or eaten," he commented to the wonder-struck Graham. "Probably the octopi have

separate hatcheries where they raise them for food."

"But—good Lord!" the first officer exclaimed. "A city—a city like ours! Down here, filled with octopi!..."

"Yes," answered Wells grimly, "and this 'city' may only be a small settlement; there may be scores of these places. We'd better continue ahead now that we're here; for we've got to get all the information we can. I only hope these monsters haven't more than one big submarine. We can expect an attack any minute...."

The *NX-1* pressed on. The city dropped behind. A breathless tenseness had settled down over the submarine; she was proceeding with utmost caution, her anxious officers alert at the location chart. The great fear that tormented them was that they might be attacked, not by one, but by a fleet of the octopi ships....

Then, at the rim of the chart, a red dot appeared! It grew rapidly, charging down on them at great speed. The spot was large; this was no small sentry boat! At once the alarm bell shrilled its warning; the crew

below left their posts and raced to the control room. With sure mechanical fingers the emergency system gripped the valve handles and motor levers; Keith swung the *NX-1* onto a level keel, straightened her out, and decreased speed still more. Giving the rods of the motor and rudder controls to Graham, he moved to the small lever which would unleash his bow torpedoes, and fingered it lightly. The *NX-1* was ready for action.

Scarcely had the men reached the small control room than the familiar electric charge tingled. They stared wonderingly at each other, half afraid. No one seemed hurt. One hand on the torpedo lever, Wells watched his charts and instruments. He thanked God that there was only one of the enemy.

The ray's shock came again—and stronger. The red dot was practically upon them. The screen was still empty. Coolly, Keith slowed the submarine to a dead stop. The crimson stud came closer....

And then he saw it. It was the same fearsome, hulking form. The same curving windows, dark and lifeless.

The same knobs on its bow, one now leaping and pulsing with the paralyzing glow. At a distance of a few hundred feet the octopi ship swerved to a halt, dousing the NX-1 with its ray unceasingly. Again those two underwater craft, so oddly contrasted, were face to face. And again the weapon that had once struck the American ship's crew down at their posts was directed full onto the *NX-1*.

But it was harmless! It merely tingled, and did not paralyze! The control room sheathing held it out stoutly. The men's faces showed overwhelming relief.

Keith smiled grimly. Now, at least, he had the devils where he wanted them; now it was his turn to strike with a—to them—terrible, mysterious weapon. They had attacked; had failed—and now he could square up for Hemmy and send a pair of torpedoes into that ship of hideous tentacles.

"Port five!" The ship swerved slightly. "Hold even!" The enemy craft was very close. The *NX-1*'s bow tubes were sighted in direct line. Her torpedoes could not possibly miss. This time, destruction for the octopi

ship was inevitable....

Keith Wells gripped the lever that held the torps in leash.

"*Wait!*"

Sparks, a bare foot from him, yelled out the word. Wells, alarmed, released his grip on the knob. The radio operator was listening intently, a circle of taut faces around his crouched back. He swung excitedly around.

"For God's sake, don't fire!" he cried. "Hemingway Bowman's on that submarine! He's alive—and calling for you!"

Chapter 5: The Other Weapon

Bowman—alive!

Keith Wells let go the torpedo lever. His whole orderly plan of action was crashed in a second.—For an instant he stood gaping at the radio man, forgetful of the peril outside, striving desperately to hit on some way of surmounting this unlooked-for obstacle. The idea of firing on his friend—killing Hemmy Bowman with his own hand—paralyzed his brain.

And in that unguarded instant the octopi struck.

From the bow of the enemy submarine, slanting from another of its peculiar knobs, a narrow beam of violet light poured, cutting a vivid swathe across the teleview. The huddled men stared at it, not comprehending what it was. They felt no shock of electricity, nor could they discern any other harmful effect. The ray held steadily on their bow, not varying in the slightest, for a full thirty seconds. And still none of them could feel or see any damage.

Wells, however, gradually became aware that he was bathed in perspiration, that great streams of sweat were coursing down his face. A quick glance told him that every member of the crew was the same way; and then, suddenly, he was conscious of a wave of intense heat—heat which quickly became terrific. The control room was stifling!

Before he could act, the *NX-1* slipped sharply to one side. A sharp hissing sound grew at her bow, climbing steadily to a shriek. Long streamers of white steam crept along the lower deck and seeped up into the control room. And then rose the fatal sound of rushing water—water pouring into the submarine from outside!

For the violet beam was a heat ray—a weapon surface civilizations had not yet developed. While the *NX-1's* crew had stared at it in the televue, it had melted a hole in their bow.

Immediately the submarine lost trim, and the deck tilted ominously. In the face of material danger—danger from a source he understood—the commander

became cool and methodical.

"Sea-suits on!" he snapped. "Then forward and break out steel collision-mat and weld it in place! Every man! You, too, Sparks and McKegnie!"

"But—but, sir!" stammered Graham. "Do you want them to get us with their paralyzing ray?"

"You'd rather drown?" Wells flung back. Silenced, the first officer donned his sea-suit, and in thirty seconds the rest of the crew had theirs on and were cluttering clumsily forward.

Alone in the control room, Keith battled with the unbalancing flow of water, maneuvering with all his skill in a futile attempt to keep the *NX-1* on even keel. The men forward worked with great speed, spurred on by the realization that they were fighting death itself, but even as they labored the submarine swung in ever increasing rolls and dips; the great weight of water she had shipped slopped back and forth; her bow went steadily down. Keith swept her forward tanks clean of water, always conscious of the

immobile, staring octopi submarine in the teleview, watching them, it seemed, curiously, and not driving home their advantage with additional bolts of the violet heat ray.

Despite her commander's frantic efforts, the *NX-1* fluttered down remorselessly; the cavern floor rose, and, sinking with them, came the octopi craft, in slow mockery of a fighting plane pursuing its stricken foe to the very ground....

She struck bottom with a soft, thudding jar, and settled on even keel. At once Wells released the helm, jumped into his own sea-suit and stumbled down to take command.

He found the steel collision-mat in place, and the welding of it nearly completed. A few feathery trickles of water still seeped through on each side, but under his terse directions the pumps were soon draining it out. The weird figures of the crew in their sea-suits looked like creatures from another planet as they rapidly finished the job.

"All right—up to the control room, everybody! Fast!" Wells roared.

The men stumbled aft as rapidly as they could in their cumbersome suits. Several were already on the ladder. A few feet further—

But at that moment the paralyzing ray again stabbed into the ship—and Keith Wells slumped helplessly to the deck. And as he crumpled, he glimpsed the grotesque, falling figures of his men, and saw one come tumbling down the ladder from the control room, where he had almost reached safety....

Peculiar sensations, unendurable thoughts raced through the commander as he lay there limply. He knew his predicament. He wanted desperately to rise, to rush to the control room. Time and time again in those first few moments of impotence he strove mightily to pull his limbs back to life. But his greatest efforts were barren of result, save to leave him feeling still weaker. The fate that he had seen strike down Brown now enmeshed him. He was paralyzed. Helpless. In the midst of his crew.

After a moment all sensation left his body. His limbs might not have existed. Sensation, pain, lived only in his brain—and there it was terrible, because self-created.

He found himself sprawled flat on his back, his eyes directed stiffly upward. He could not move them, but out of the corners he vaguely sensed the other figures around him. Helpless, every one! And who knew if they would ever come out of the spell! Victory had gone to the octopi....

Minutes that seemed like hours passed. And then a well-remembered voice sounded in the radio earphones in his helmet. It was Hemmy Bowman, speaking from the enemy ship.

"Keith! Keith Wells! Are you there?" the voice cried.
"Keith! What have they done to you?"

And Keith, he could not answer! He could not answer that troubled voice of his friend—that voice from a friend he had thought dead.

Again Bowman spoke. "Keith! Can't you hear me? What are they doing to you? Oh—" For a moment it stopped, then came once more, thick with anguish. "Oh, God, what's happened?" Then lower: "If only there were light, so I could see what they're doing...." The voice tapered into silence. Keith could picture Hemmy, probably bound, giving him up for dead....

Then, quite distinctly, he heard a clank at the *NX-1's* bow! The submarine jerked, her bow tilted up—and with increasing speed she moved forward, silently as a ghost.

Keith thought he knew what that meant. The octopi ship had grasped them with another of its hawser arms, and was pulling them away. But where to? One of those mound cities? His brain was a turmoil as he tried to imagine what was before them. But all he could do was lie there and wait.

The American craft was towed for perhaps ten minutes—ten ages to her commander—then coasted slowly to a pause, and with a sharp jar settled into rest. As she did so, every light in her hull went

suddenly out.

It had been bad enough with the lights on, but the darkness was far worse. The submarine was a tomb—as silent as one, and full of men who lived and yet were dead. Hemmy Bowman's voice came no more to Wells. He was alone with his moiling doubts and fears and unanswerable questions, and he knew that every other man there was alone with them, too....

As his eyes became partially accustomed to the darkness, he could distinguish vaguely the forms of the familiar mechanisms above him. A slight noise grew suddenly and resolved itself into a prolonged scraping along the outer hull of the submarine. At intervals it paused and gave way to a series of sharp, definite taps.

Keith realized what those sounds signified: the octopi were striving to find some entrance to the *NX-1*! This, he told himself, was the end. The creatures would break through; water would rush in, and every man would drown. For the face-shields of their sea-suits were open!

The dull scrapings ran completely around the motionless submarine, punctuated with the same staccato tappings. By the movement of the sound, Wells realized the octopi were approaching the lower starboard exit port. And as they neared that port, the noise abruptly stopped.

Then for some minutes silence fell. Next, the commander heard what was unmistakably the exit port's water chamber being filled—and a moment later emptied again. The devilish creatures had solved the puzzle of the means of entrance!

In the awful darkness the inner door of the port swung open. A slow, slithering sound came to Wells' ears. He sensed, though he could not see, the presence of alien creature. An odor struck his nostrils—that of fish....

A deliberate something crawled directly across one outstretched arm, and another across his legs. And above him loomed a monstrous, complicated shadow, which, after a moment, slowly melted from his line of vision. Panicky, he strove again to bring his limbs

back to life, but still could not....

Keith knew that in the darkness which their huge unblinking eyes could penetrate they were inspecting the *NX-1*'s interior, examining the men stretched on its deck, feeling them with their cold metal-scaled tentacles. Another complicated shadow crept back over the commander's line of sight, and from all around rose the slithering, shuffling tread of the octopi's many tentacles, rasping on the steel flooring.

Sweat from Wells' forehead trickled down and stung his eyes as he lay in that dark agony. There seemed to be countless investigating tentacles feeling through the entire submarine. One of them, iron-hard, suddenly coiled under his armpit and lifted him lightly as a feather from the deck. Another snaked up and clicked his face-shield securely shut. Keith heard other clicks, and knew that the shields of his men were likewise being closed.

The commander was held straight out from the octopus' revolting body, and as he swung, helpless, he could see that more men were grasped similarly in

other mighty arms. Dangling in the shadow-filled darkness he was carried slowly to the exit port, and he heard the inner door swing open, then close again. Water streamed through the valves; it encompassed him with a feeling of lightness, a feeling of floating, as he swung at the end of the long metal-sheathed tentacles. A moment later a soft bluish glow burst on his vision, and he saw that he was outside. There was a long wait, and when the current next swung him around he was dismayed to see that every one of the monstrous creatures near him was dangling on high two or three men of his helpless crew. The whole outfit was in the power of the devil-fish!

And then their captors moved forward with them on a ghastly march of triumph....

But Keith Wells did not know that, crouched behind the instrument panel in the control room, shivering and sick with fear, was the plump form of Cook Angus McKegnie, who had just gained it just before the paralyzing ray had struck.

Chapter 6: The Monster with the Armlets of Gold

Hemingway Bowman's ardent wish, after he was whipped quickly through the round exit port of the octopi submarine, was for a quick, clean death. The horror and mystery of his situation had left him with one conscious emotion, that he was afraid. The worst had been when he was hauled through the port; when, expecting anything, he had been able to see nothing in the dark, water-filled mystery ship.

Deliberate tentacles had stroked over every inch of his body—tentacles that were not metal-scaled, as had been the arms of the creature that captured him. It was then that he guessed the true purpose of the metal suits the octopi wore—to protect their bodies against the lesser pressure near the surface of the sea. Inside the submarine they did not need them. He decided that the ship was used for rapidly transporting large numbers of the octopi to distant regions, and also for a weapon of offense and defense. The intelligence of the cuttlefish astounded him.

Keith had got away. At least he knew that, and he

thanked God for it. His bold stroke had not been in vain, his sacrifice not useless.

After the inspection of the tentacles, Hemmy had been shoved to a corner of the octopi submarine. He had felt cords wrapped around his body. After being thus secured, he was left to himself. He was utterly alone, except for strange, vague shadows that floated through the darkness—shadows that heated his brain as he realized how many of the devil-fish there were.

Hours that seemed like endless days passed.

Bowman concluded that the submarine had gone straight through the cavern and emerged finally into what seemed to be another sea. Dead silence filled the ship. What was happening, he could only guess. The craft seemed to run on forever. Never once did tentacles brush or inspect him again.

Finally the ship stopped, and a great round door opened in one wall. By the soft bluish glow that seeped in Hemmy caught a glimpse of his surroundings, and his gorge rose at the sight. The

ship was literally filled with a slowly waving forest of long black tentacles. Weird instruments, unlike anything he had ever seen, were grouped around the walls, and before them attendant octopi poised, their hideous eyes fixed and steady. There were no dividing decks as in the *NX-1*; the craft was one huge shell.

Then came furious activity. The door fell shut again, and the ship shot off at great speed. Hemmy felt sure that they were advancing to again attack the *NX-1*, and at once began to try to reach his comrades through radiophone. He knew that Wells would come back.

Finally he caught a human voice, and heard the *NX-1*'s radio operator shout to the commander that he, Bowman, was alive and calling. But when he tried to speak further, the American craft's radio was silent.

And then, in the octopi submarine, had come a soft glow of violet....

Was it a more deadly weapon than the paralyzing ray? In great suspense the prisoner waited. Silence—

silence! Horrible doubts beset his mind. Was Keith refraining from firing his torpedoes because he, Bowman, was on board the enemy boat? The thought stung him. He tried desperately again to reach Wells; but there was no answer. Were the Americans dead?

Age-long minutes passed. Then the exit port opened and several metal-clad octopi swam out. Hemmy had a glimpse of the *NX-1* lying silent and apparently lifeless on the sea-floor, a gaping hole in her bow!

As if to taunt him with the sight, the creatures left the round door open, and presently Bowman beheld the octopi open the *NX-1*'s starboard exit port and enter. Later the port swung open again, and he saw the monsters emerge, each gripping several men clad in yellow sea-suits! That they were dead, or victims of the ray, was obvious from the way they limply dangled.

The exit port closed, and darkness filled the octopi ship. Hemmy Bowman panted with the futile effort to break his bonds.

"You devils!" he yelled in blind rage, exhausted. "Why don't you take me with them? Take me! Take me, damn your stinking hides!"

When Keith Wells was taken from the silent *NX-1*, a host of astounding impressions swarmed his brain. Swinging lightly at the end of his captor's tentacle, he strove as best he could, with eyes rigidly fixed straight ahead, to grasp his new surroundings. He had, first, one flash of the octopi ship lying quite close to them, its hulk, as always, immobile and apparently lifeless. And inside it, he was sure, was his friend and first officer, Hemmy Bowman—a captive.

He saw that the octopi submarine had towed the *NX-1* into one of the weird mound cities. His own ship was lying in what seemed a kind of public square, and crowds of black octopi were swarming around it as he and his crew were brought out. Shooting straight off the square ran one of the wide streets he had previously seen from above, and on each side the brown mound-buildings rose. Their details were hazy, because of the cuttlefish inhabitants who swam thickly in front of them.

His captors started their march down this broad street. Great crowds of reddish-colored octopi clustered on each side of it; other swarms hung almost motionless—except for their constantly writhing tentacles—above, so that their line of progress was through what resembled a restless, living tunnel of repulsive black flesh, snaky arms and huge, unblinking eyes. Keith felt faint from the horror of it. Thousands of the monsters were there, all hanging in the soft, blue-glowing water; and occasionally, as he floated almost horizontally in his captor's firm grip, his legs would brush the wall of clammy flesh; or perhaps one of the tentacles would reach out as if to touch him.

The octopus that held him swam some five feet off the street bed itself; at intervals the thick swarm on either side would part for a second, and Keith could glimpse the huge mound-buildings, ever growing larger, with round entrance holes dotted all over their smooth surface, above as well as the sides.

The march was ghastly. Their captors were taking them through the heart of the water-metropolis;

displaying their human captives as did the Caesars in Roman triumphs of old!

The swarming crowds of tentacled monsters grew thicker as they progressed, and their tentacles began to whip more quickly, as if anger was burning in their loathsome bodies. Keith noted the menace of their sharp-beaked jaws, and the sickening sucker-discs on the livid under-side of the tentacles. As far as he could see, the swarms fell in behind the procession after it had passed. Following them—where?

Just as Wells felt himself on the verge of fainting, the procession turned to the right and entered the largest mound-building of all, a vast dome rising in the very center of the octopi metropolis. They continued through a corridor perhaps twenty feet high, from which at intervals other corridors branched. Held by one arm, and ever and again turning helplessly over in his horizontal transit, Keith caught glimpses of walls covered with intricate designs on a basic eight-armed motif—designs of artistic value, that gave evidence of culture and civilization.

The passage ended as suddenly as it had begun, and they came into the main body of a gigantic building.

The commander could hardly credit his eyes. The place resembled a stadium, and was so vast that he felt dwarfed to nothingness. The domed roof soared far above in misty bluish light. On the floor, exactly beneath the center of the great dome, was a raised platform, and on it a dais resembling a very wide throne. Around the dais a score or more of octopi—officials, Keith supposed—were grouped.

Rapidly the creatures following the procession swam into the chamber. Monstrously large as the place was, the floor soon was filled with the thick flood of cuttlefish which swarmed in from many doors. Keith, held with the other captives just to one side of the hole he had entered by, began to think that they must soon refuse to let any more in—when, to his surprise, he saw the latest arrivals begin to form a gallery twenty feet above those on the ground floor, and, when this was extended far back and completely filled, start yet another above it—and another, and another.... In ten minutes the mighty hall was

crowded with countless layers of the cold-eyed monsters, each layer angling up from the central dais so that all could see.

"God!" the commander thought. "Nothing but solidly-packed devil-fish all the way to the dome! A slaughter pit! And we, of course, are to be the cattle!"

Minutes passed. The throne was still empty, and the thousands in the amphitheater seemed waiting for an occupant. Keith wished he was able to close his eyes. The restless, never-ceasing weaving of the countless tentacles in the levels above made the scene a nightmare. Some waved slowly, others whipped excitedly, but never for an instant did one pause. The movements were like the never-ceasing shifting and swaying of the trunks and feet of elephants; in the dim glow the huge chamber seemed to be filled with one fantastic, million-tentacled monster that stared with its thousand eyes down on the forlorn group of puny human beings....

As if at a command the arms of the octopi on the platform suddenly began to weave in perfect unison

in some weird ceremony. First they swayed out towards the waiting captives, then they swerved slowly to the empty throne. Then came a few quick, excited whippings; and once more the long arms reached out at the small group at the entrance. This went on for some minutes. Then, very suddenly, a creature swam up from what must have been an opening in the floor onto the dais-throne.

Keith saw it well.

It was an octopus, a giant amongst octopi, and Wells knew at once it was the ruler of the realm, the lord and master of the swarming galleries and the cities of mound-buildings.

It was larger than its fellows by a full three feet. And, encircling each great tentacle just where it joined the central mass of flesh, was a broad, glittering band of polished gold—eight thick armlets that ringed the creature's revolting head-body with a circle of gleaming pagan splendor. Keith could almost fancy that a certain royal air hung over the monster.

The huge, unblinking eyes of the king stared at the horror-frozen captives. One long tentacle lifted slowly upward, and their captors at once started towards the throne with them. The score of octopi on each side stilled their weaving arms. A battery of emotionless eyes drilled into Wells' paralyzed body. He felt faint. Unquestionably the horrible ceremony was leading up to some form of cold-blooded sacrifice....

The monarch stretched a mighty arm towards Keith, and, as in a dream, he felt himself lifted out of his guard's grasp. The snakelike tentacle gripped him about the waist, and held him dangling like a puppet twenty feet in the water while the two deadly eyes stared steadily at him. He was brought closer, until the hideous central mass, with its cruel beaked jaw and ink sac hanging behind, was no more than a foot away.

Then another arm stroked slowly along the commander's helpless body. Once or twice it prodded sharply, and Wells felt a surge of fear, for his sea-suit might break. Deliberately the prying tentacle moved over him, delicately feeling his helmet, his weighted

feet, his legs.

Keith Wells grew angry. He was being inspected like a trapped monkey! He, commander of the *NX-1*, representative of one of the world's mightiest nations—prodded and stared at by this fish, this octopus! A great rage suffused him, and with a terrific effort he tried to jab his arms into one of those devilish eyes. But try as he might, his body would not respond. He could not move a finger.

For a long time the loathsome inspection continued, until the monstrous king seemed satisfied. Wells was handed back. There followed an interminable period in which nothing whatever was done, as far as he could see. He was sure that they must be talking, debating, but no sound reached his ears through the tight helmet. All the time the endless motion in the swarming levels above went on. It became hazy, dreamlike, and in spite of himself the commander began to feel drowsy. The weaving and swaying was producing a hypnotic effect. At last the desire to sleep grew overpowering.

Wells and his men were more than half unconscious when their original captors finally pulled them back from the royal presence and began a humble retreat from the throne room. Slowly they backed to the entrance. Keith's last drowsy glimpse was of a grotesque, gold-ringed monster on a throne, with a score of smaller tentacled creatures around him, and a vast haze of weaving tentacles and unblinking eyes above.

They passed from the huge chamber. The commander felt delirious, as in a nightmare, but he knew that they were again in the long corridor, and that their captors were taking them further into the mighty building, further from the street outside. He glimpsed great rooms branching off the corridor, and swarms of black octopi inside them. The light became fainter; and at last the procession turned into a separate, rough-walled chamber, dimly lit and empty.

Wells felt the grip around his arm loosen, and he floated limply to the floor among his men. He slept....

Chapter 7: The Glass Bell Jar

Keith awoke hours later.

Slowly he became conscious of a cramped, stiff body, of a dull pain racking his head. He stretched out his limbs—and, suddenly, realized he could move.

Remembering the paralyzing ray that had struck him down, and half afraid that his senses were tricking him, he kicked his left leg out. It moved with its old vigor. He quickly found that his strength had returned, that he could feel and move. The effect of the ray had worn off!

With a glow of new hope he rose to his feet and exercised numb muscles. Looking around, he saw the other men still stretched out on the floor of their rough-walled, watery prison. He called into his radiophone mouthpiece:

"Graham! Graham, wake up!" A grotesque figure stirred among its fellows; turned over. "It's Wells, Graham," Keith continued. "Get up; you can, now!"

And he watched the form of his big first officer stretch out and finally rise, while stupid, sleepy sounds came to his radio receiver.

"Why—why; the paralysis is gone!" Graham said at length.

"Yes, but maybe the octopi don't know it. Rouse the other men at once, and we'll see what we can do."

It was weird, the sight of the lifeless figures of the men stirring to life in the dim-lit water as Graham shook each one's shoulder. The radiophones buzzed and clicked with their excited comments and ejaculations. Keith felt much better. With his men restored to strength, and clustered in a determined, hard-fighting mass, he saw a hope of breaking out and regaining the *NX-1*.

He let them exercise as he had for some minutes, then proceeded to a brisk roll-call. There should be fifteen men and two officers. Rapidly Graham ran over the names, and each time a voice rang back in reply—until he came to the cook.

"McKegnie?... Cook McKegnie?"

There was no answer. Wells stared around the group of dim figures and himself called the name again. But McKegnie was not present. And as the commander and his men realized it the numbing spell of their desperate position settled down on them again like a shroud.

Keith shook off the mood. "Well," he muttered, "I guess the devils got him. Poor McKegnie's seen the wheels go round for the last time.... All right: take command, Graham. I'm going to do a little reconnoitering."

The round entrance hole was some fifteen feet from him, at the far end of the cell. Keith advanced cautiously to it, the peculiar light feeling the water gave him making his steps uncertain. The dim blue illumination made the details of the corridor outside hazy, shadowy, but it seemed to be empty. Peering out, Wells could sight no guarding octopi. He edged closer and stared down to the left. Twenty feet away the vague light tapered into darker gloom, filled with

thick, wavering shadows; but it was apparently devoid of tentacles. He wondered if the octopi were unaware that the effects of their ray had worn off, and peeped cautiously around the edge to the right.

Immediately a long arm whipped out, grasped him around the waist and flung him twisting and turning back into the chamber. Graham laboriously made his way to the commander and helped him to his feet. "Hurt, sir?" he asked anxiously.

"No," Keith gasped. "But that devil—"

He stopped short. The first officer turned and followed his commander's stare.

The entrance hole of the cell had filled with a monstrous shape. A huge octopus was resting there, its unblinking eyes coldly surveying the crew of the *NX-1*. On each of its thick tentacles was a broad band of polished gold. It was the king, the same creature that had inspected them from the throne-dais a few hours before. And behind him in the corridor the men glimpsed another octopus.

Slowly the ruler of the octopi swam into the chamber. Its great eyes centered icily on Keith Wells, standing at the head of his cowering men; and its mighty tentacles waved slowly, gracefully, as if the creature stood in doubt. One of them tentatively reached out and hovered over their heads, moving uncertainly back and forth. Then, like a monstrous water snake, the tentacle poised, flicked out and plucked a man from his comrades.

His shriek of terror rasped in their earphones.

"Steady, men!" Keith cried. "It's hopeless to try and fight them! The monster just wants to look him over!"

The man—Williams, a petty officer—was dangled by the armpit in mid-water and made to slowly revolve. The tip of another huge arm snaked out and for some seconds stroked his body, probing curiously. He panted with fright, and in their earphones his friends could hear his every tortured exhalation. Anxiously, Keith watched. Then, without warning, another tentacle darted up, fastened its tip on the breast of the captive's sea-suit, and deliberately ripped it open.

The doomed man's last scream rang in their helmets as the water poured into his suit. They saw him writhe and struggle desperately in the remorseless grip which held him. The two huge eyes of the cuttlefish surveyed his death throes minutely; watched his agonized struggles gradually weaken; watched his legs and arms relax, his head sink lower.... And then the tentacle let a lifeless body float to the floor.

Jennerby, a huge engineer, went completely mad. "I'll get him, the devil!" he yelled, and before Keith could command him to stay back, had flung himself onto the giant king.

Death came as a mere matter of course. Without apparent effort, the monarch ripped off Jennerby's helmet and sent him spinning back. The man's body writhed and shuddered, and in a moment another stark white face showed where death had struck....

Trembling, sick at heart, the commander yet had to think of his men. "For God's sake," he cautioned them, "keep back. Don't try to fight now; we've got to wait

our chance! Steady. Steady...."

The king's deliberate tentacle again began its slow weaving. It was choosing another victim. And this time it darted straight out at Keith Wells and gripped him with a mighty clutch about the waist.

The commander did not cry out. As he was brought close to the staring eyes, and felt their sinister gaze run over him, it flashed through him for some obscure reason that the monster knew him for what he was, the leader, from the tiny bars on each shoulder of his sea-suit.... He waited for the tentacles to rip it open.

But they did not. Instead, the creature turned and swiftly swam with him out through the entrance hole.

They went to the left in the corridor, further into the heart of the building. The bluish light became stronger. As Keith twisted in the giant monarch's grip he glimpsed the other octopus following with the two dead men. He saved his strength knowing it was hopeless just then to try and struggle free.

Quick as was his passage, he noticed that the walls of the corridor were covered with intricate designs, in bas-relief, and colored. He passed row after row of mural paintings of octopi in various activities, and guessed that they represented the race's history. One was obviously a scene of battle, with a tentacled army locked in combat with another strange horde of fishlike creatures; a second showed the construction of the queer mound-buildings on the sea-floor, with scores of monsters hauling great chunks of material into place, and another pictured the huge audience chamber, with a gold-banded king motionless on his throne.

As the king drew him rapidly along, he had a glimpse through a circular doorway of a large room, inside which were clustered the black shapes of thousands of baby octopi, tended by what were evidently nurses. Other such rooms were passed, and the young commander's brain whirled as he tried to measure the size and progress of this undersea civilization. Perhaps the race of octopi was growing, reaching out; needed new room to colonize. That would explain why

their submarine had been sent through the tunnel....

A voice sounded in his ears:

"Keith? Are you all right?" It was Graham, calling from the cell behind.

"So far," Wells assured him. "I'll keep in touch, and let you know what happens."

At that moment, his captor carried him into a large chamber at the end of the corridor. He looked around, and decided it was a laboratory. He beheld strange instruments, anatomical charts of octopi on the walls and, in one corner, a small jar of glass, in which a dull flame was burning. Many-shaped keen-bladed knives lay on various low tables, and thin, wicked-looking prongs and pincers.

"I'm in their experimental laboratory, Graham," Wells spoke into the mouthpiece of his tiny radio. And then his roving eyes saw something that made him audibly gasp.

"What's the matter, Keith?" came the first officer's anxious voice.

After a moment the commander answered. "It's—it's a pile of human bodies. The bodies of those fishermen. They—they've been experimenting on them...."

Was he, too, Wells wondered, to be experimented on? The sight of that stacked pile of bodies chilled him with horror. He kept his eyes from them, till the octopus with the golden bands swung him through a hinged door in the farther wall.

He found himself in a side room, smaller than the outer chamber, the whole center of which was occupied by a huge glass bell jar, some thirty feet in diameter. Inside it was much strange-looking apparatus on tables, and trays of operating instruments—knives like those in the outer room, and the same thin prongs. The great jar was empty of water, and on one side was an entrance port.

The king tossed Keith into a corner and quickly donned a metal-scaled water-suit. When he had it all

on, and the glass body-container fastened into place, he picked up his captive again and advanced through the bell jar's entrance port into a small water chamber. A moment later Wells felt his body grow heavy as the water of the compartment ran out, and then there was a click and he found himself inside the jar, still held in the merciless grip of a tentacle.

He twisted around to find the cold eyes of the octopus staring at him only a foot away. And as he wondered what was going to happen next, the king unfastened the glass face-shield of the commander's sea-suit with a quick flip of the tip of a tentacle.

Keith's arms were pinned to his sides; he could not move to try to refasten the face-shield. Fearful, he held his breath; held it until his face was purple and his lungs were near to bursting. But at last the limit was reached, and with a great wrench he sucked in a full breath.

It was clean, fresh air!

The air was like a breath of his own world brought

down to this cold realm of octopi. Once he had caught up with his breathing it poured new life into his limbs, jaded from the artificial air of the sea-suit. Keith felt his muscles respond, felt his whole body glow with new strength and life. Twelve inches away the king was watching his every reaction closely through the huge helmet of glass. The thought passed through the commander's mind that he was not only king, but chief scientist of this strange water civilization.

Then, while his lungs swallowed hungrily the good, fresh air, several tentacles began to feel around him in an attempt to unfasten the rest of his sea-suit.

Wells blanched at the sudden realization of how helpless he would be if the suit were taken from him. He would then not only be a prisoner of the octopi, but a prisoner of the glass jar, unable ever to leave it, and more than ever at the mercy of his captor's least whim. Not that he had any delusion that he would live long in any case: it was just the simple strong instinct of self-preservation that made him grab at every chance for life.

This thought flashed through his mind, even while the octopus was fumbling with the catches of his suit. And along with it was born a desperate plan of escape. He was in his own element, air; the octopus out of his. If he could crack the glass of the king's helmet, and let the water out and air in!... The glass was only twelve inches away.

The commander stopped his resistance, and at the same time felt about with his legs until he had them well braced against a lower tentacle. He pushed gently, and came a few inches nearer the glass; a little more. Then, with a quick, strong jerk of his body he crashed the steel frame of his helmet square against the cuttlefish's sheathing of glass.

The creature was taken wholly by surprise. Tentacles whipped out to tear the rash human quickly away—but not before Keith had pounded again, and heard the splinter of smashed glass! He had jabbed a hole in the glass body-piece, and already the life-giving water was pouring out!

Panic seized the king, and he became a nightmare of

tortured tentacles. Wells was flung wildly away and fetched up against the side of the jar with a crash that for a second stunned him. More and more water poured from the octopus' suit, and air at once rushed in to take its place. The creature's great eyes became filmy, while the revolting spidery body slewed here and there across the jar, all the time whipping and thrashing at the strangling air. Keith scurried from side to side, trying to keep out of reach of the crazy, writhing tentacles. Once a glancing blow knocked him flat, but the monster was altogether unconscious of him and he got away.

Little by little the terrific whipping and coiling of the tentacles quieted down. The drowning king lay in one place now; its loathsome red body, no longer protected by glass, turned bluish. Keith thrilled with elation at his victory.

And then, for the first time, he noticed that there was a full three inches of water on the floor—far too much to spill from the king's suit. A quick look around showed him where it came from. There was a long crack in the side of the glass jar, at the place where

he had been crashed against it—and water was pouring in!

Keith flung himself against the crack, jammed his arm into the broadest part of the leak. But still the water rushed in. The octopus was in its death throes, weakening steadily—but just as steadily the water poured in and rose up the sides of its body. In a flash Wells saw that the liquid would win the race to cover it and allow the monster to resume breathing.

"Oh, damn it!" he cursed fervently. "Now I've got to run for it!"

He stumbled to the port, snapping shut his face-shield as he went. In a moment he had solved the working of the mechanism and was in the water chamber, then outside in the room itself. Fortunately his sea-suit was unhurt. He thanked heaven for that as he tore away a boardlike piece of apparatus and jammed it over the leak in the jar.

Keith paused a moment to plan. The king of the octopi was still writhing in ever weakening struggles, but

the water was halfway up his body. "It'll cover him soon," thought the commander, "and then it's a question how long it'll take him to come to. I've got to move fast—slip out into the corridor and run the gauntlet back to the men." His eyes rested on a large knife, and he appropriated it, since he saw nothing else he might use.

For the first time since the beginning of the fight he answered the questions and exclamations that had constantly sounded in his ears from the distant crew. Tersely he told them what had happened, and of the gauntlet he had to run.

"Make ready for a dash to the *NX-1*," he finished. "It's now or never. Wait three minutes for me, and if I don't make it, go ahead anyway. Remember—three minutes. This is an order. So long, fellows!"

He shut his ears to the bedlam of comment that followed. His knife ready, he took a few steps to the door and pushed out—right into the tentacles of a waiting octopus.

His knife was useless. While locked motionless by three arms of his captor, another streaked out and wrenched it from his hand. Once again Keith was absolutely helpless.

Great confusion resulted in the laboratory. The commander heard no sound, but the guard must have called, for five more octopi darted rapidly out of an adjoining room. Their tentacles writhing in great excitement, they swam past and into the inner chamber to the rescue of their nearly drowned king.

The devil-fish that held Wells almost crushed him to death in its excitement. It was obviously undecided what to do; but finally it sped him down the passageway and cast him back inside the cell with his men. Then it quickly retreated.

The commander staggered to his feet and faced Graham and the others. "A miracle!" he gasped; "I'll tell you later. But now we've got to make our break. The king's out, and we've got to get away before they bring him to. There's nothing to do but rush the door. It means sure death for half of us, and probably for all

—but God help us if the king catches us!"

He paused and surveyed them keenly. "Everybody with me?" he asked. And not one man held back his answer.

Wells smiled a little. "Good!" he said.

There were twelve men and two officers. There were thousands of octopi. On the face of it, their chances seemed hopeless. Not for a second did Keith count on getting many men to the *NX-1*. But he knew where the submarine was, and he had to try.

Tersely he gave them final instructions.

"This corridor leads to the main entrance. That is, to the right—understand? Then straight down the street outside, to the left, is the square where they towed the *NX-1*. I'd say it was a hundred yards.

"There's one guard outside. Graham, you and half the men to the right of the door. I'll take the rest to the left. Our only chance is to try and destroy the octopus'

eyes."

His mind cast about desperately for some form of weapon. The only detachable thing on their sea-suits was the small helmet-light, a thing, Keith told himself, without possible offensive use. Still, the beams would enable them to more clearly see their path and keep together, so he ordered them in hand.

The men were grouped and alert. The moment had come.

"Remember," he said, "—its eyes. Then stick together and run like hell. All right—good luck—and let's go!"

Awkwardly, stumbling clumsily in the retarding water, the small group surged through the door. Immediately a black shape pounced upon them from the clustered shadows—the guarding octopus.

Its tentacles seemed to be everywhere. In seconds five men were clutched in its awful grip, their fists rising and falling impotently as the hideous arms constricted and crushed them inward. Keith, free of

the clasp, yelled: "The eyes! The eyes! Put out its eyes!"

For answer, a yellow arm clutching a helmet-light broke through the grotesquely milling mass and struck at the cuttlefish's great pools of eyes. It missed, but the switch flicked on, and there stabbed through the gloom a broad, glaringly white ray.

Its effect was astounding. The beam smote the octopus squarely in its huge eyes, and immediately the creature shuddered; writhed with pain. The tentacles released the men—and the monster fled back into the protecting shadows!

A shout from the men roared in the commander's earphones. "They can't stand the light!" he cried. "Thank God! Beams on, everyone! Flash 'em in their eyes! Forward!"

Fourteen shafts of eye-dazzling light forked through the corridor. The tiny company, beating their path with criss-crossing shafts of white, forged ahead. They thrashed the shadows with their beams, probing

each inch of water—clearing their way even as a tank hoses machine-gun bullets before its clumsy body. Their former slender chance grew; they filled with hope.

Another swarm of devil-fish, long arms whipping before them, raced from branching corridors and bore down on the company of humans. The men were ready, and fourteen tongues of white met them squarely. They faltered; the weight of their fellows behind shoved them on; but the rays steadied, and the front row of octopi broke in panic. The others at once followed in wild retreat.

"Keep together, men!" Keith ordered sharply. "One beam to each octopus—straight in its eyes till it retreats! Forward!"

They pressed on. The octopi, with eyes used only to the soft blue glow of the cavern, could not stand against the brilliant rays. Keith leading, the *NX-1's* crew stumbled out into the street.

They faltered a moment when they saw each entrance

hole of the mound-buildings shooting out streams of octopi. Hundreds were in sight already. The whole city was evidently alarmed. Wells at once formed his men in a circle, so their beams would guard them on every side and above. Apparently the octopi could not approach within thirty feet of them, and even at that distance they turned and fled, writhing with pain, whenever a shaft of light struck full in their eyes.

"The square's just ahead!" the commander roared. "One last rush, now, and we'll reach the submarine! Stick close; keep your arms locked; and watch out above!"

The circle of men narrowed. The rays gave their tiny cluster the appearance of a monster even more fantastic than those moiling around them—a monster with long straight tentacles of glaring white. They stumbled forward through the magically parting ranks of black octopi. The beams kept the creatures back; they were helpless before them.

Foot by foot under the inverted bowl of threshing tentacles the *NX-1*'s crew lumbered ahead. The street

at last ceased; the wide square opened before them.

"We're here!" Wells yelled exultantly. "This is the—"

His voice fell into abrupt silence. He stared around the square, and his heart went cold indeed. They had reached the right place, but it was empty.

The *NX-1* was not there!

Chapter 8: Cook, the Navigator

Through all these hours, one man had remained on the *NX-1*, and that man was, to put it mildly, scared to death.

Cook Angus McKegnie had been nearest the connecting ladder when Keith Wells roared out the command to retreat above, and his desire to regain a place of safety was so earnest that he made the control room in record time. At once he had felt the tingle of the paralyzing ray. Struck by a horrible thought, he ventured to peer down the ladder—and groaned to see the figures of his comrades, all lying limply on the deck. His portly frame quivered like jelly as realization came to him that he was the only one who had escaped the ray.

Heroic ideas of saving the submarine, of rescuing the men below, flashed wildly through his head. But only for a moment. On second thought, he felt he ought to hide. So, in the tomblike silence that had fallen, the two-hundred-and-twenty-pound McKegnie wormed a way behind an instrument panel, effecting the journey

by vigorous shoves of his stomach. It was minutes later that he first noticed that some sharp jutting object was jutting deep into his ample paunch, but he could do nothing to remedy it. He was hidden, anyway, and he was going to stay hidden!

The cook felt the *NX-1* being towed forward. Then, after a dreadful wait, he heard queer noises down below, and was positive the exit ports had opened. The snakelike slithering and shuffling which followed would mean that the enemy was inside the *NX-1*. The thought brought St. Vitus' dance to his limbs, and, try as he might, he couldn't still them. Then again the ports opened, the gloomy silence returned, and Angus McKegnie was alone with his reflections.

After the first hour he gave voice to them in one simple, bitter sentence. "Just why the hell," he muttered, "did I ever join the Navy?" The silence offered no reply, and McKegnie, desperate from his cramped position, ventured to poke his head around the instrument panel. The faint emergency lights showed the control room to be empty. He decided to come out, and did so, worming his way back with

great difficulty.

Once out, the first thing his eyes fell on was the televue screen. Now the cook had never seen one of the octopi, and the screen showed hundreds of monsters clustering around the *NX-1*. So with unusual promptness he acted, jamming himself once again into his hiding place. Maybe, he thought, they had some way in which they could see into the control room and discover him!

Hours passed. The cook was sopping with sweat. Finally his thoughts emerged into words.

"I got to get out of here!" he said intensely. "I *got* to! And I got to run this submarine!"

The sound of his voice somehow emboldened him. Once more he backed out of his cranny, and with cautious, trembling steps explored the control room. He kept his eyes from the televue, though it had a terrible fascination for him, and surveyed the *NX-1's* array of control instruments. The prospective navigator groaned at the sight.

There were dozens of mysterious wheels, jutting from every possible angle, squads of black and red-handled levers, whole armies of queer little stud-buttons and dials. His knowledge of cooking helped him not at all in the presence of that maze of devices. Timidly he touched one of the levers, but immediately snatched his hand away as if afraid it would bite. His boldly announced purpose of running the craft went glimmering.

An accidental glimpse of the monsters in the televue suddenly decided him that he needed a weapon. He hunted frantically through the lockers and found three service revolvers, which he fastened at his waist, adding his own carving knife to the arsenal. But he didn't feel much better. Then, remembering for the first time his sea-suit radio, he yelled: "Mr. Wells! Mr. Wells! Oh, Mr. Wells, where are you? Can you hear me?" There was, of course, no answer.

He tried to bring his muddled thoughts and fears to order. "I got to run this thing," he said doggedly. "*Got* to! Now, let's see: what the hell's this thing for?... What the—"

He broke off short, and his eyes went wide. He had heard a noise!

Yes—there it was again! The same peculiar scraping at one of the exit ports! He glanced fearfully at the televue. "Oh, Lord!" he yelled. "They're comin' in to get me!"

He started to dive back behind the instrument panel, but stopped, drew two guns, and in an agonized muddle trotted back and forth for a moment, waving them. Another look at the screen showed that an exit port was open, admitting two metal-scaled octopi. McKegnie couldn't stand it any longer: he wedged himself behind his panel again. Soon sounds of the metal tentacles on the deck below told him that one of the creatures was coming up the ramp—then slithering into the control room itself. The cook was a lather of cold perspiration.

For a few minutes there was silence. The octopus was apparently surveying this new part of the submarine. Then, without warning, the tip of a metal-scaled tentacle felt around the panel and crept, exploring, up

Angus McKegnie's leg—which leg was again suddenly afflicted with St. Vitus' dance. The tentacles coiled, pulled hard—and the cook with a yowl was yanked out into the room.

Dangling upside down, high in the air, he submitted to the fishy stare of the great eyes under the sheathing of glass. But soon he started to squirm, and his violent contortions brought a rush of blood to his head, making him quite dizzy. It was while he was in that state that things started to happen.

First, a great roar rolled through the *NX-1*, and McKegnie found himself flat on the floor with his breath knocked out. Then, while this was registering on his mind, he discovered himself the center of a madly milling set of tentacles, and instinctively scrambled out of the way. From a distance he saw that the tentacles belonged to the octopus that had held him, and that their coilings and threshings were gradually dying down, until only a quiver ran through them from time to time. While McKegnie was trying to figure this all out he noticed that the monster's glass sheeting was shattered, that it lay in a pool of

water, and that the odor of burnt powder was in the air. Looking down he found that he had a gun in his hand. A thin wisp of smoke was curling from the barrel.

"Gee whiz!" he ejaculated. "Gee *whiz*!"

As he stood there recovering from his surprise, he heard the other octopus crawling up the connecting ramp, coming to see what had befallen its fellow. Preceded by two trembling guns, McKegnie tiptoed to the ramp and peered down.

From the darkness he saw another complicated mass of metal tentacles and glass advancing up towards him. Fear smote the cook, and almost without volition he pointed his guns and pulled the triggers. As before, a bullet crashed into the great dome of glass, and he watched a short but terrible death struggle. He had, by himself, slain two octopi!

A tremendous elation filled McKegnie—until it occurred to him that his shots might have been heard outside. At once he ran and looked at the televue

view screen, and what he saw on its silver surface took all the triumph abruptly out of him. The octopi outside were darting about with alarming activity; a whole cluster of them was centered at the exit port, and, even as the cook stared, the preliminary sounds of opening it came to his ears.

"Now I *got* to run this ship!" he groaned.

He peered at the mass of levers and wheels, put out a hand, closed his eyes, hesitated, and pulled one of them back. Nothing happened.

He tried another. The noise below grew, but still the *NX-1* remained motionless. Desperate, the cook jerked several other levers. The whine of electric motors surged through the silence; the submarine shuddered and slewed off to the right, as if trying to dig into the sea-floor.

"I got it started!" he cried. He did something else. The *NX-1* stuck her bow dizzily up and sped into the misty-blue realm above in a grand, sweeping circle. The sea-floor with its mound-buildings and swarming

octopi fell away behind with a rush.

"There!" muttered the triumphant cook. "But—how did I do it?"

The submarine was rising like a sky-rocket. McKegnie remembered suddenly that Wells had said the cavern was only a few miles high; he must now be very near the top. He held his breath while he pushed a likely looking lever the other way.

He was lucky. The *NX-1* capered like a two-year-old, kicked up her stern and bolted eagerly for the depths once more. Again the floor of the cavern rushed up at him, again he pulled the potent lever back, and again the submarine meteored upward.

This procedure went on for some time. McKegnie was only running an elevator. Was he doomed to dash up and down between floor and ceiling forever? He gave forth pints of sweat, now and then groaning as the submarine grazed horribly close to top or bottom. The dead octopus at his feet slithered limply around on the crazy-angling deck.

"I can't keep this up forever!" the cook said peevishly.
"Now, what the hell's this thing for?"

He turned it, and the *NX-1* tilted in one of her dives and raced forward, midway between ceiling and floor. Her navigator relaxed slightly. He had found the major controls; at least he had been able to stop his dizzy game of plunging up and down. Then, just as he was beginning to wonder where he could go, a large red spot glowed at the edge of the location chart.

"Oh, Lord!" he cried. "That's the other submarine—an' it's comin' after me!"

Evidently it was, for the red spot rapidly approached the green one. The paralyzing ray tingled, and a moment later the enemy's huge bulk loomed on the televue screen, a band of violet light spearing from one of her jutting knobs.

Frantically McKegnie juggled his levers, and then it was that the *NX-1* really showed what was in her. She emulated, on a grand scale, a bucking bronco: she stood almost on her nose, and threatened to describe

somersaults; she tried it the other way, on her stern; she rolled dizzily; she all but looped the loop, and went staggering around the cavern in great erratic bounds that must have made the octopi think she was in the hands of a mad-man—which she practically was. Her designer would have had heart failure.

In the televue screen the frantic McKegnie would see the octopi submarine rush erratically by with a flash of its violet heat ray; the location chart showed the red spot zigzagging drunkenly around the green one. Each boat made occasional short, crazy darts at the other; sometimes they would stand approximately still. It was a riotous game of tag, and McKegnie knew too well that he was "it."

During one brief pause the anguished cook found himself groaning aloud: "Oh, Mr. Wells, where are you? I can't keep this up! I can't! I can't!"

There were still several important-looking controls that were mysteries to him. But what if he should pull one and open all the exit ports? He shuddered at the thought.

Things had become nightmarish. The ship was pitted scores of places by the heat ray. The control room had grown stifling. McKegnie was losing pounds of flesh, and literally stood in a pool of his own perspiration. The octopi craft kept doggedly after the *NX-1*, no matter how often and effectually the sweating cook's reckless hands prevented her getting the heat ray home.

For a long time the two ships continued to race up and down. The *NX-1* would plunge, pirouette around the other, and scamper away towards the ceiling as if enjoying it all hugely, abruptly to forsake her course and come zooming down once more. She would weave in romping circles and seem to go utterly crazy as her jumbled navigator pulled his levers and turned his wheels in a frantic effort to get somewhere.

To get somewhere! Yes—but where?

"Oh, Mr. Wells, where are you?" the harried cook would bleat at intervals.

Or, plaintively: "Now, what the hell's *this* thing for?"

Chapter 9: At Bay

Fourteen humans stood at bay on the cold sea-floor, dazed by the ruthless stroke of ill-luck which had taken the *NX-1* from where they had left it.

"It's gone," whispered Graham over and over in a hopeless tone. Keith tried to pull himself together. He had to think of his men.

In a second, his whole plan, which had seemed to be approaching success so rapidly, was smashed by the disappearance of the submarine. Mechanically he kept his helmet-light playing into the ever-thickening eyes and tentacles around him, while he scanned the sea-floor nearby. It was filling more closely than ever with the black, writhing forms of the cuttlefish. The rays still held them back, but their great bulk loomed over the small party of humans like a sinister storm cloud. Soon, in their overwhelming mass, they would crush down, and the submarine's crew be conquered by sheer force of numbers.

"Look!" Keith cried. "There's where she was lying!"

He pointed out on the floor of the square a deep groove, obviously made by the hull of the *NX-1*. Its length and jaggedness seemed to denote that the submarine had tried to bore into the bed of the cavern itself. Wells was mystified. If the octopi-ship had towed her away, she would certainly not have gouged that deep scar on the sea bottom....

But he dismissed the strange disappearance from his mind. He had to work out a plan of action.

"Keep together, men, and follow that scar!" he ordered tersely. "There's a chance that the *NX-1*'s somewhere further along!"

It was a futile hope, he knew—but there was nothing else. The tiny group, centered in the inverted bowl of black, writhing tentacles, lumbered onward.

Then the octopi struck with another weapon, in an effort to dull the spearing beams of white. Here and there from the mass of black an even blacker cloud began to emerge. It quickly settled over the whole scene, pervading it with a pitchy, clinging darkness

that obscured each man from his neighbor.

"Ink!" cried one of them. It was sepia from the cuttlefish's ink sacs—the weapon with which these monsters of the underseas blind and confuse their victims.

"Faster!" the commander roared in answer. "And for heaven's sake, keep together!"

They huddled closer. Under the protecting cloud of ink the mass of octopi pressed nearer. The struggle became fantastic, unreal, as the brilliant beams of white bored through the utter blackness searching for eyes which the men knew were there, yet could not see until their rays chanced upon them. Snaky shadows milled horribly close to the little group of bulging yellow figures. Blacker and blacker grew the water; they could not always see the monsters as they drove them back on each side. Now and then a bold tentacle actually touched one of them for a moment before its owner was thrust, blinded, away.

Suddenly the dark cloud cleared a little as the fight

moved into an unseen current. Their range of vision lengthened to ten or twelve feet; they could dimly sense the looming mass of cuttlefish: and it was less often that one of the monsters darted forward, daring the rays of white, and became altogether visible. When this did happen, half a dozen dazzling beams converged on the octopus' eyes and drove it back in writhing agony.

The men were the hub of a grotesque cartwheel, whose spokes were inter-crossing rays of white. They still forged onward along the groove, but moved more slowly now, and Keith Wells, tired to death, realized the combat could not go on much longer. Their advance was useless; a mere jest. The *NX-1* had vanished. It would only be a question of time before their batteries gave out, or the swarms of octopi crushed in on the struggling crew. Their overwhelming numbers would tell in the end.... The men were silent, except for the occasional gasps which came from their laboring lungs.

And then the king of the octopi appeared.

Keith had been wondering, in the aching turmoil that was his brain, where the gold-banded monarch was. He knew the monster had been rescued, and he dreaded coming face to face once more with that huge form. Now, armlets of glittering yellow suddenly flashed in the thick of the besieging tentacles, and two great evil eyes glared for a second at Keith Wells. The commander flung a burst of light at them and laughed crazily as the monster scurried back. For a few moments the king was not visible.

"Well, fellows," Wells said, "it won't be long now. His Majesty's back on the field." He grinned a little through his weary face. "I wonder what he'll hatch up to combat our helmet-lights? Watch close: he's damn clever!"

The commander did not have long to wonder. The vague wall of tentacles began retreating deeper into the ink. Keith could not imagine the reason for it, but held himself taut and ready. His men, likewise noting the move, unconsciously grouped closer, waiting tensely for they knew not what.

The king of the octopi had indeed hatched a plan of attack. After a moment the mass of creatures again became slowly visible, but this time when the rays shot out they did not hold them back. Could not—for their eyes were not visible.

"My God!" Wells cried. "They're coming backwards!"

It was so. The octopi—no doubt under their ruler's orders—had turned themselves around, and now, with eyes directly away from the dazzling shafts of white, were closing slowly in on the humans from all sides. The helmet-lights were useless. They could not reach the creatures' eyes.

Tentacles coiling, whipping, interweaving, the wall of flesh pressed in. Death stared the helpless crew of the *NX-1* in the face. First Officer Graham shrugged his shoulders and said tiredly:

"Well, I guess it's all over.... Unless," he added with a feeble smile, "somebody figures a way to melt us through the sea-floor...."

Keith Wells' face suddenly lit up with an idea. He swung around and roared:

"The hell it's over! We can go *up*!"

His crew understood at once. "What fools we—" Graham began, but Keith cut him short.

"Listen," he rapped quickly. "Jam together in one bunch and lock arms tight. When I give the word, flood your suits with air. We'll go up like comets; crash right through the devils.... Hurry!... All ready?"

He saw that they were. "Then, together—go!" he commanded.

As one man the crew adjusted their air-controls, bulging the sea-suits with air. Their weighted feet left the cavern floor at once, and, locked tightly together, the whole fourteen of them shot like a bullet to the living ceiling of unsuspecting cuttlefish above.

They hit with a terrific crash. Keith was momentarily stunned by the force of impact. He felt himself torn

away from his men, felt a dozen tentacles snake over him, and mechanically stabbed out with his helmet-light. For a moment he was held; then the air and his light pulled him through, and he broke out through the top.

In his rocketing upward progress the extra oxygen rapidly cleared his mind. Glancing below he saw a great, dark, many-fingered cloud dropping rapidly away, and was glad to know that the octopi could not follow him into the lesser pressures above without their suits. Over the dark cloud he glimpsed a few scattered pin-points of light—the helmet-beams of the other men. They were rising as swiftly as he.

"Thank God!" he murmured reverently. "We broke through! We broke through!"

Chapter 10: The Return of the Wanderer

Wells watched the several helmet-lights shooting upwards and wondered if they represented all the men that had got safely through the net of tentacles. Remembering the rocky ceiling they were rapidly approaching, he ordered the others to reduce speed by discharging air from their sea-suits. He received no articulate answer.

Although he cut down the rush of his own progress, it was with a jar that he bounded into the top of the cavern. As he dangled there, he beheld four light beams hurtling upward; his earphones registered crash after crash: and then he saw the beams go spinning down into the gloom again, weaving and crossing fantastically, the shock having jerked them from their owner's hands. Keith had lost his own helmet-light below, but peering around he could make out a few vague forms, bumping and twisting in the current.

"Graham!" the commander called. "Graham, you there?" After a moment his first officer's voice came

thickly back.

"Yes—here. A bit groggy. That crash...." Wells swam clumsily towards him.

"I guess only a few of us broke through," the commander said slowly. As the two officers hung at the roof, swinging grotesquely, one by one the other men came to their senses and reported their presence in the radiophone. Keith ordered them to cluster around him, and soon eight weird figures had grouped nearby. After a while they located two others, which brought their total to ten men and two officers. They looked a long time, but could not find any more. Two were gone.

Deep silence fell over the tiny group. The dark mass of the rocky ceiling scraped their helmets; below, the bluish waters tapered into a thick gloom, hiding, miles beneath, the mound-buildings and swarming octopi.

One of the men spoke. His words were audible to everyone, and they voiced the thought in every brain:

"What're we going to do now?"

Keith had no answer. They had escaped the immediate danger, but it was only a temporary respite. The commander knew it was hopeless to try and locate the tunnel leading to the outer sea, for they were very tired, and in their clumsy suits they would be able to swim only a few rods. Their helmet-lights were gone; they had played their last card.

"They're goin' to find us after a while," the pessimistic voice continued. "They'll send that submarine of theirs after us—or maybe they'll come up in their metal suits...."

"Well," Keith replied with forced cheerfulness, "then we'll have to fight 'em off."

"Why not rip our suits an' end it now—" began another, but Graham's voice cut in sharply.

"Quiet!" he said. "I heard something!"

The men stilled abruptly. In tense silence their ears

strained at the headphones. Wells asked: "What did you hear?"

"Wait!" Graham interrupted, listening intently. "There it is again! Listen! Can't you hear it? Why, it sounded like—like—"

Keith concentrated his whole mind on listening, but could catch nothing at all. He was just about to give up when he caught a faint, jumbled murmur—the murmur of a human voice.

"My God!" he whispered. The voice, little by little, grew, and Wells could distinguish words. They formed into a complete sentence. Keith heard it plainly. It was:

"Now, what the hell's this thing for?"

Unmistakably, it was the voice of Cook Angus McKegnie, whom they all had thought dead.

Amazed, the men of the crew started to jabber.

"Quiet!" Wells ordered sharply. He listened again.

McKegnie's voice was growing quickly and steadily louder.

"McKegnie!" the commander cried excitedly.

"McKegnie, can you hear me?" There was no answer. Patiently Wells waited a minute, every second of which increased the volume of his long-lost cook's bewildered tones. Again he tried.

"McKegnie! Can you hear me? This is Commander Wells. McKegnie!"

The cook's stammering voice came back:

"Why—why—is that you, Mr. Wells? Did I hear you, Mr. Wells?"

"Yes!" Keith shouted impatiently. "This is Commander Wells! For heaven's sake, McKegnie, where are you?"

"I don't know, sir!" the cook responded. "Where are you?"

Keith was for the moment perplexed. "But—but, are

you a prisoner?" he questioned. And he could have sworn he heard a distinct note of pride as the invisible McKegnie replied: "Oh, no, sir! Not yet! These devils been tryin' their best to get me, but they couldn't! No, sir!"

Wells became more and more puzzled. "Then—but—you're not running the *NX-1*, are you?"

McKegnie's voice was much louder now, and growing every second. The note of pride persisted. "Of course, sir!" he confirmed. "It was kind of hard at first, with these octopises botherin' me, but I got onto it pretty quick. That octopis ship chased me with them heat rays for a long time, but I ain't seen them lately. I guess I kinda tired them out."

His last words grew louder with a rush, and from the dark depths beneath a long shape suddenly appeared, hurtling up at the group of astounded men in a zoom that bade fair to take it straight through the ceiling. It was the *NX-1*.

"Dive, man, dive!" Keith yelled. "Cook, pull that black-

handled lever towards you! Yank it back! Yank it back! Quick!" He sighed with relief as he saw his madly-driven submarine pause, whip its nose downward, and crash back for the depths from which it had come.

The commander spoke rapidly. "McKegnie, listen: Leave the black lever halfway, so you'll level out. Straighten your helm. We're only a little above you; come round in a circle till I tell you to stop."

The *NX-1* came out of her dive, and, as the cook evidently shoved her helm over, went skirting around in a wide, drunken circle, some thousand feet below her regular crew.

"All right!" Keith shouted. The fear that the octopi submarine would dart back before he could get aboard his ship was looming in his mind. "You're at the helm, Cook; there's a wheel right over your head. Spin it around—oh, my God, there you go again!" He groaned while the *NX-1* went swooping off on a repetition of her crazy circle.

"Sorry, sir," the culinary navigator said thickly. "I guess I got the wrong thing."

"Now!" Wells roared. "Spin that wheel above your head.... That's right—right—there! Don't touch a thing, Cook! We're coming down."

The submarine had paused directly beneath them, listing slightly to port. Then began the cautious business of the descent. Under Wells' rapid orders the men linked arms again and discharged more air from their sea-suits. Slowly, thin chains of bubbles rising behind them, they sank towards the dim shape of the *NX-1* below. Wells' eyes kept probing the thick gloom far beneath. Every moment he expected to see it disgorge a swarm of octopi.

They neared the submarine, and saw numberless pitted spots in her body, where the heat ray had stabbed for a moment. In their excitement they missed their level by some feet, but clutching together they admitted more air and soon rose even with the starboard exit port.

"Swim forward," Keith ordered. "Hurry!" The weird figures groped clumsily, and very slowly neared the port. The commander, in the van, at last reached out and gripped its jutting external controls. He could not work them at first: his hands were numb and awkward.

As he tugged and struggled with them a shout rang in his headphone. It was McKegnie, scared to death.

"Oh, hurry, Mr. Wells!" he yelled. "Quick! Quick, please! The octopis ship's comin', sir! The red light's back!"

Chapter 11: To the Death

The emergency steadied Keith's fingers. He got the door open and motioned Graham and six men inside the water chamber. The passage took but a minute. Then he sent the rest of the crew in, being himself the last to enter. When the chamber was finally empty, and Wells had stepped through the inner door onto the lower deck of the *NX-1*, a great sigh of relief broke from him. Never before had anything looked so good as that brilliantly lit deck with its familiar maze of machinery and bulkheads.

"Thank God," he said simply, and his joy was shared by the whole crew. A new feeling had come over them. Back home—in their own submarine, their own element—they had at least a fighting chance with the octopi. But Keith let them waste no time. He knew that a final, desperate duel to the death with their foe still was ahead. "Above to the control room," he ordered. "Fast!"

They lumbered up the connecting ramp. A disheveled, wild-eyed form met them. Keith couldn't help

chuckling as he passed the now much thinner and paler cook, with the arsenal handy at his waist. On the deck of the control room lay a huge tentacled body, metal-scaled, with its dome of glass shattered and its great cold eyes staring unseeingly away. "I killed him," stammered McKegnie pridefully; "but Mr. Wells—look at that red light, sir!"

Keith glanced rapidly at the location chart, ripping off his sea-suit as he did. The fateful red stud was moving swiftly down on the motionless green one. The men had surrounded McKegnie, laughing and slapping him on the back, but the commander's terse orders jerked them abruptly back to action.

"The rectifiers, Graham: clean out this stale air. Sea-suits off; at emergency posts. Take the helm, Craig; you, Wetherby, trim the ship. No, no, Cook—keep away from the controls!"

The *NX-1* balanced herself; fresh air came rushing in, sweeping out the stale. Keith stared at the location chart, waiting for the submarine to be ready. The red light was almost upon them.

"Right!" he roared at last. "Diving rudder controls, Graham! Full speed for the tunnel!"

At that moment the octopi ship swept into view, its full battery of offensive weapons flaring forth. The paralyzing ray tingled again and again over the control room. Someone laughed at its uselessness. The violet heat ray leveled full at them, but the commander avoided it with "Port ten, starboard ten! Maintain zigzag course to the tunnel." He understood the enemy's weapons now; he was throbbing with the fierce thrill of action. This duel was to be the climax of their whole adventure. "And, by heaven," he promised, "it's going to be a fight!"

The other craft seemed to realize the *NX-1* was now in expert hands. She raced along to starboard for some minutes, her heat ray trying vainly to steady on the American's weaving form. Wells wondered if the king of the octopi was aboard her, in command; he thought perhaps the ship had postponed her chase of McKegnie to pick him up. "I hope he is!" the commander breathed, and fingered the torpedo lever. He had some debts to pay.

The *NX-1*, engines working smoothly, proceeded on a desperate dash for the tunnel that led to the outer sea. But the octopi ship apparently knew what Keith intended, for she abandoned her offensive rays, changed course a few degrees and slowly but steadily pulled ahead. "Damn!" Keith exclaimed. "She'll get there before us!"

The dim shape dwindled on the screen, and before long her bulk had disappeared entirely. Wells then could watch her swift, straight progress only on the location chart.

Ten minutes later the funnel-like opening of the tunnel loomed on the teleview, and squarely in front, blocking it, was the waiting form of the octopi submarine.

"Quarter speed!" Keith snapped. "Hold her steady, Graham; I'm going to try a bow torpedo. I think we're beyond their ray."

Sighting his range on the telescopic range-finder, he worked the *NX-1* slowly into position. He noticed that

his first officer was staring oddly at him. He was bothered by the queer look. "What's wrong?" he asked impatiently.

"But—what about Hemmy Bowman?"

Bowman! In the rush of action and suspense, Keith Wells had completely forgotten his officer in the enemy submarine. "Oh, God!" he groaned. The cruel situation that had stayed his hand once before had again come to falter his course of action. The men were watching him; Graham had a question in his eyes. They all knew what had to be decided....

Keith shrugged his shoulders hopelessly. It was his greater duty to destroy the octopi submarine. And yet —

"Fish for Hemmy, Sparks," he ordered. "Craig, keep present distance from enemy. Full stop."

A moment later the radio operator looked up. "Mr. Bowman on the phones, sir." With a heavy weight on his heart the commander clipped on the extension

headphones.

"Hemmy?"

"Keith? Keith? Thank God you're alive!" Bowman's voice shook with gladness. "You're all back on the *NX-1*, Keith? The whole crew's with you? Oh, Lord, it's good to hear you again!"

"Yes. We got back all right, Hemmy—a miracle. They've still got you prisoner?"

"Yes.... Keith—you're trying to dodge out of the tunnel, aren't you?"

Wells smiled bitterly, and as he paused to frame an answer Bowman spoke again.

"I want you to blow up this submarine, Keith," he said quickly. "A favor to me."

He cut Wells short when the commander started to interrupt. "Wait! Let me finish," he pleaded. "I want to explain. I'd been hoping—but never mind that...."

Keith, a while ago I managed to work loose. I lost my head completely and tackled these devils. It was a foolish thing to do; they overcame me, naturally. But, in the struggle, they tore my sea-suit."

"What!"

"Oh, just a tiny tear, or I wouldn't have lasted till now. But a leak all the same—in the right leg. Since then I've been gripping the edges of the fabric as tightly as I can—but I couldn't keep the water inside this ship from seeping through. It came in slowly at first, then faster as my hands grew numb. It's up to my neck now, Keith ... and—it won't be long! I've just a few minutes left...."

The faint words tapered into silence.

"No!" roared Keith in a great rush of emotion. But Hemmy's eager voice came right back:

"Oh yes, you must! It would be a mercy to kill me, Keith."

There were tears in the commander's eyes. "Are you sure, Hemmy?" he asked. "Are you sure?"

"Oh, yes. It would be a mercy."

Wells' lips formed a straight grim line. His words squeezed through it tightly. "All right, Hemmy. Thanks. Thanks. I—I'll go after them now, old man. I'll try and keep in touch with you through the duel, but I—I can't promise—"

He could almost see Hemingway Bowman give his old familiar smile as he answered:

"Then so long, Keith!"

Commander Keith Wells studied the televue screen. The men were half afraid to look at his strained blanched face.

Repeatedly the violet beam speared through the water, reaching for the *NX-1*'s bow.

"Turn ship. Line up for stern torpedoes," the

commander ordered harshly. He realized he could not hold his submarine steady to obtain a perfect sight, for the heat ray needed only thirty seconds to melt through their shell. He would have to swing the ship slowly about; and, as the shape of the enemy crossed the hair-lines on the range-finder, unleash his torpedoes and gamble on hitting the moving target.

The *NX-1* swung around, always maintaining a slight forward motion and zigzagging constantly to nullify the heat beam. Wells watched the range-finder closely. The octopi ship slanted downwards, the deadly violet ray stabbing from her bow. Slowly the black dot that represented her appeared on the dial, and slowly it dropped towards the crossed lines that showed the perfect firing point.

Keith grasped the torpedo lever. The *NX-1*'s stern was towards her target. Dead silence hung in the control room. The *NX-1* swung slightly. The octopi craft appeared directly in the middle of the dial.

Wells pulled back the lever.

The hiss of compressed air sprang from her stern. He had fired two tubes, his whole stock of stern torpedoes. The pair of dreadful weapons leaped out and settled on their course. Keith shot his gaze to the television.

The torpedoes missed. Only by feet, but a miss all the same. They raced on past the octopi submarine and, with a tremendous, ear-numbing explosion, burst on the wall of the cavern beyond. Both ships reeled from the shock. Graham swore viciously, but Wells' masklike face showed no slightest change of expression....

A voice rang in Keith's headphones. "Tough, Keith! Better luck next time!" Then the commander winced. He simply could not answer Hemmy Bowman; could not answer that fine, brave voice....

The stern torpedoes were gone. The tubes could not be reloaded, for the paralyzing ray bound the men to the control room. That left them two torpedoes in the bow.

The violet heat ray kept fingering hungrily on their outer hull, and every man knew that the plates were weakening under the steady strain, which was only lessened by the *NX-1*'s constant zigzagging. The control room was very hot. Both ships were now a full mile from the tunnel entrance. Keith plunged the *NX-1* down, swung her around, to bring his bow tubes to bear, and zigzagged upwards.

It was obvious that the octopi craft had been alarmed by the terrific explosion. They now adopted tactics similar to the American ship's, and for awhile both submarines circled cautiously, maneuvering for an opening.

"If only we could keep the ship steady!" Graham muttered. "But then that heat ray'd get us!"

The commander kept his eyes on the televue. Again and again the violet shaft pronged at them. The heat grew stifling. Sweat was pouring from all the men's bodies. Every face was strained and taut.

"Starboard full!" Wells said suddenly. "A little up,

Graham!" He had seen a chance; the octopi craft was slightly above, and in a moment would pass directly in the line of the bow tubes. The *NX-1* stuck her nose up, swung rapidly to the right. Keith pulled back the firing lever, releasing one torpedo.

The long messenger of death hurtled straight for the enemy's hull. They watched its course breathlessly....

"My God!" the first officer groaned. "Could they see it coming?" For the octopi submarine had swung to one side, neatly dodging the speeding tube of dynamite.

"One left!" he added bitterly. "One left!"

A desperate plan formed in Keith Wells' mind. His last torpedo simply had to strike the mark; he could take no chances with it. He motioned the haggard-faced Graham to him.

"There's only one thing left to do," he said quietly.

"We've got to deliberately face that heat ray; chance its puncturing our plates."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"Get in very close, so as to make our last torpedo sure to hit. We've got to approach the enemy head-on at full speed. We'll corkscrew up to them until we get within two hundred yards, then go straight forward for ten or fifteen seconds, giving us the opportunity to sight the remaining torpedo directly on them. The heat ray may break through before I fire—but when I do fire it's a sure hit."

The men had heard every word. Quietly Wells ordered:

"Take the torpedo control, Graham. I'll take the helm."

The first officer obeyed without a word. Keith grasped the helm. The plans were made for their last desperate attempt.

"Right," the commander said shortly. "Here we go."

There had been a taut silence before, but now,

knowing that they were deliberately offering themselves a perfect target for the heat ray in order to get their last torpedo home, the intensity was almost unbearable. The men felt like shrieking, jumping—doing anything to break the awful hush. The air was charged with the same unnameable something that heralds a typhoon.

Keith Wells was like a white statue at the helm, save for the betraying trickles of sweat that coursed down his drawn cheeks. His hands moved the wheel slowly from port to starboard; his eyes bored at the screen before him. The ship was in command of a man of steel, a man with but one purpose....

"Up—up," he ordered. "Hold—in trim—full speed forward!"

He had brought the *NX-1* directly in line with the octopi ship. And now the craft leaped forward under full power, while he shot the helm back and forth ceaselessly. His ship was describing a corkscrewing motion, weaving straight at the enemy. Grasping her opportunity, the octopi submarine remained

motionless, steadily dousing the approaching American craft with her silent violet ray and driving the temperature in the control room to even greater heights.

The distance between them rapidly lessened. Would the plates stand it? Would the ray melt through the weakened steel before he could fire? With an effort Keith drove these doubts from his mind ... but he could not banish a certain dull, steady ache from his consciousness....

The range dwindled. The heat became intolerable. Everyone's clothing was sopping wet. A man ripped off his shirt, gasping for air. Wells kept his eyes on the screen, though half-blinded by smarting sweat. The plates had to give soon, he knew.

The octopi submarine, beam on and dead ahead, began to move to port at quickly increasing speed. At once Keith stopped swinging the helm, and the *NX-1's* corkscrewing motion of protection ceased. And then came the real test, the gauntlet of seconds.

Right straight into the retreating violet beam they went, at top speed. They gained rapidly. The heat was furnace-like. The commander, watching the range-finder, kept moving the helm slightly over. A shaft of violet heat spanned the two shells of metal. For ten seconds it had held on the *NX-1*. The black dot of the enemy craft moved slowly to exact center on the dial. Fifteen seconds ... twenty ... twenty-three—

"Fire!"

Graham jammed the torpedo lever back.

"Crash dive!"

The deck tilted downward. And Wells' white lips formed the words, "So long, Hemmy!"—and he tore the phones from his head.

Seconds later a titanic explosion sounded through the cavern; echoed and re-echoed in vasty roars. The American craft's lights went off—but not before her men had seen, in the teleview, a fire-shot maelstrom where a moment before the octopi submarine had

been.

"We got them!" yelled Graham.

A roar of exultation burst from every throat. The men flung their arms out, jumped, yelled crazily. Faint emergency lights lit the scene.

"Below, at regular posts," Wells ordered. "Reload bow and stern tubes. Graham, see to the lights." He himself remained at the helm. In a few moments the submarine had climbed back to the level of the tunnel. At quarter speed she nosed into the wide entrance, and slowly forged into the dense, deceptive shadows.

The commander acted mechanically. Again by touch he steered his ship through the black, ragged cleft. Fifteen minutes after leaving the cavern of the octopi her bow poked through the weaving kelp into the free, salty depths of the Atlantic Ocean.

There was one more task to perform, and Wells lost no time in doing it. When two hundred yards away he

halted the *NX-1*, steadied her and sighted the stern tubes just above the dark tunnel hole. Quickly he sent forth two torpedoes.

A huge roar rumbled through the water, whipping the beds of kelp to mad convulsions. "Turn around," the commander ordered harshly. He sighted his bow tubes and again let loose a bolt of two torpedoes. Then he sent the submarine forward, and, through the televue, examined what his four weapons had done.

Huge chunks of rock had been tumbled down, completely closing the tunnel.

"Well," said Graham, "it's over! Finished! They'll never get through that!"

A full-throated cheer burst from the men below, a cheer that rang for minutes as they realized they were free forever of the octopi, of the cold underwater city, of the clutching tentacles. Graham grinned broadly.

"Sound happy—eh?" he chuckled. "Say, Keith, it's good we've got those two octopi our fighting cook killed. Knapp would never believe our story without them!"

He stared curiously at his commander. Wells was standing quite still, facing the teleview screen. A strange, far-away look was in his eyes.

"What's the matter, old man?" the first officer asked, smiling straight at him. "Aren't you glad we won through?"

"Of course," answered Keith with a tired smile in return.

"But why did you look that way?" Graham persisted. And Keith Wells told him:

"I was just wondering if Hemmy told the truth."

71 The Black Lamp by Sterner St. Paul Meek

Dr. Bird and his friend Carnes unravel another criminal web of scientific mystery.

Aproximate word count: 9,900

Bigotry:

Warnings:

he leapt to one side as he spoke



- - -

"The clue, Carnes," said Dr. Bird slowly, "lies in those windows."

Operative Carnes of the United States Secret Service shook his head before he glanced at the windows of the famous scientist's private laboratory on the top floor of the Bureau of Standards.

Dr. Bird and his friend Carnes unravel another

criminal web of scientific mystery.

"I usually defer to your knowledge, Doctor," he said, "but this time I think you are off on the wrong foot. If the thieves came in through the windows, what was their object in cutting that hole through the roof? The marks are very plain and they indicate that the hole was cut in some manner from the inside."

Dr. Bird smiled enigmatically.

"That is too evident for discussion," he replied. "I grant you that the thieves entered from the roof through that hole. After they had secured their booty they left by the same route. I presume that you have noticed the marks on the roof where an aircraft of some sort, probably a helicopter, landed and took off. A question of much greater moment is that of what they did before they landed and cut the hole."

"I don't follow your reasoning, Doctor."

"Carnes, that hole was cut through the roof with a heavy saw. In cutting it, the workers dislodged quite a

little plaster which fell to the floor and must have made a great deal of noise. Why wasn't that noise heard?"

"It was heard. The watchman heard it, but knew that Lieutenant Breslau was working here and he thought that he made the noise."

"Surely, but why didn't Breslau hear it?"

"How do we know that he didn't? He was taken to Walter Reed Hospital this morning with his mind an absolute blank and with his tongue paralyzed. He must have seen the thieves and they treated him in some way to ensure his silence. When he is able to talk, if he ever is, he'll probably give us a good description of them."

Dr. Bird shook his head.

"Too thin, Carney, old dear," he said. "Breslau is a very intelligent young man. He was perfectly normal when I left him shortly after midnight last night. He was working alone in here on a device of the utmost

military importance. On the desk is a push button which sets ringing a dozen gongs in the building. Surely a man of that type would have had sense enough when he heard and saw intruders cutting a hole through the roof to sound an alarm which would have brought every watchman on the grounds to his assistance. He must have been knocked out before the hole was started, probably before the helicopter's landing."

"How? Gas of some sort?"

"The windows were all closed and locked and I have already ascertained that the gas and water lines have not been tampered with. Gas won't penetrate through a solid roof in sufficient concentration to knock out a man like that. It was something more subtle than gas."

"What was it?"

"I don't know yet. The clue to what it was lies, as I told you, in those windows."

Carnes moved over and surveyed the windows closely.

"I see nothing unusual about them except that they need washing rather badly."

"They were washed last Friday, but they do look rather dirty, don't they? Suppose you take a rag and some scouring soap and clean up a pane."

The detective took the proffered articles and started his task. He wet a pane of glass, rubbed up a thick lather of scouring soap and applied it and rubbed vigorously. With clear water he washed the glass and then gave an exclamation of astonishment and examined it more closely.

"That isn't dirt, Doctor," he cried. "The glass seems to be fogged."

Dr. Bird chuckled.

"So it seems," he admitted. "Now look at the rest of the glass around the laboratory."

Carnes looked around and then walked to a table littered with apparatus and examined a dozen pieces carefully.

"It's all fogged in exactly the same way, Doctor," he said. "The only piece of clear glass in the room is that piece of plate glass on your desk."

Dr. Bird picked up a hammer and struck the plate on his desk a sharp blow. Carnes ducked instinctively, but the hammer rebounded harmlessly from the plate.

"That isn't glass, Carnes," said the doctor. "That plate is made of vitrilene, a new product which I have developed. It looks like glass, but it has entirely different properties. It is of enormous strength and is quite insensitive to shock. It has one most peculiar property. While ultra-violet and longer rays will penetrate it quite readily, it is a perfect screen for X-rays and other rays of shorter wave length. It appears to be the only piece of transparent substance in my laboratory which has not been fogged, as you call it."

"Do short waves fog glass, Doctor?"

"Not so far as I know at present, but you must remember that very little work has been done with the short wave-lengths. In the vast range of waves whose lengths lie between zero and that of the X-ray, only a few points have been investigated and definitely plotted. There may be in that range a wave-length which will fog glass."

"Then your theory is that some sort of a ray machine was put in operation before the helicopter landed?"

"It is too early to attempt any theorizing, Carnes. Let us confine ourselves to the known facts. Lieutenant Breslau was normal at midnight and was working in this room. Some time between then and seven this morning he underwent certain mental and physical changes which prevent him from telling us what he observed. During the same period, a hole was cut in the roof and things of great importance stolen. At the same time, all the glass in the laboratory became semi-opaque. The problem is to determine what connection there is between the three events. I will handle the scientific end here, but there is some outside work to be done, and that will be your share."

"Give your orders, Doctor," said the detective briefly.

"To understand what I am driving at, I will have to tell you what has been stolen. Naturally this is highly confidential. Some rumors have leaked out as to my experiments with 'radite,' as I have named the new radium-containing disintegrating explosive on which I have been working, but no one short of the Secretary of War and the Chief of Ordnance and certain of their selected subordinates knows that my experiments have been successful and that the United States is in a position to manufacture radite in almost unlimited quantities from the pitchblende ore deposits of Wyoming and Nevada. The effects of radite will be catastrophic on the unfortunate victim on whom it is first used. The only thing left to do was to develop a gun from which radite shells could be fired with safety and precision.

"Ordinary propellant powders are too variable for this purpose, but I found that radite B, one form of my new explosive, can be used for propelling the shells from a gun. The ordinary gun will last only two or three rounds, due to the erosive action of the radite

charge on the barrel, and ordinary ordnance is heavier and more cumbersome than is necessary. When this was found to be the case, the Chief of Ordnance detailed Lieutenant Breslau, the army's greatest expert on gun design, to work with me in an attempt to develop a suitable weapon. Breslau is a wizard at that sort of work and he has made a miniature working model of a gun with a vitrilene-lined barrel which is capable of being fired with a miniature shell. The gun will stand up under the repeated firing of radite charges and is very light and compact and gives an accuracy of fire control heretofore deemed impossible. From this he planned to construct a larger weapon which would fire a shell containing an explosive charge of two and one-half ounces of radite at a rate of fire of two hundred shots per minute. The destructive effect of each shell will be greater than that of the ordinary high-explosive shell fired from a sixteen-inch mortar, and all of the shells can be landed inside a two-hundred foot circle at a range of fifteen miles. The weight of the completed gun will be less than half a ton, exclusive of the firing platform. It is Breslau's working model

which has been stolen."

Carnes whistled softly between his teeth.

"The matter will have to be handled pretty delicately to avoid international complications," he said. "It's hard to tell just where to look. There are a great many nations who would give any amount for a model of such a weapon."

"The matter must be handled delicately and also in absolute secrecy, Carnes. We are not yet ready to announce to the world the fact that we have such a weapon in our armory. It is the plan of the President to have a half dozen of these weapons manufactured and give a demonstration of their terrible effectiveness to representatives of the powers of the world. Think what an argument the existence of such a weapon will be for the furtherance of his plans for disarmament and universal peace! Public sentiment will force disarmament on the world, for even the worst jingoist could no longer defend armaments in the face of America's offer to scrap these super-engines of destruction and to destroy the plans from

which they were made. If the model has fallen into the hands of any civilized power the damage is not irreparable, for public opinion would force its surrender and return. It is among the uncivilized powers that our search must first be made."

"That makes the problem of where to start more complicated."

"On the contrary, it simplifies it immensely. At the head of the uncivilized powers stands one which has the brains, the scientific knowledge and the manufacturing facilities to make terrible use of such a weapon. In addition, the aim of that power is to overthrow all world governments and set up in their stead its own tyrannical disorder. Need I name it?"

"You refer to Russia."

"Not to Russia, the great slumbering giant who will some day take her place in the sun in fellowship with the other nations, but to Bolsheviki, that empire within an empire, that horrible power which is holding sleeping Russia in chains of steel and blood.

It is there that our search must first be made."

"Of course, they have no official representative in America."

"No, but the Young Labor Party is as much their accredited representative as the British Ambassador is of imperial Britain. Your first task will be to trail down and locate every leader of that group and to investigate his present activities."

"I can tell you where most of them are without investigation. Denberg, Semensky and Karuska are in Atlanta; Fedorovitch and Caspar are in Leavenworth; Saranoff is dead—"

"Presumably."

"Why, Doctor, I saw with my own eyes the destruction of the submarine in which he was riding!"

"Did you see his dead body?"

"No."

"Neither did I, and I will never be sure until I do. Once before we were certain of his death, and he bobbed up with a new fiendish device. We cannot eliminate Saranoff."

"I will include him in my plans."

"Do so. Besides a hypothetical Saranoff, there are a half dozen or more of the old leaders of the gang who are alive and at liberty, so far as we know. They fled the country after the Coast Guard broke up their alien smuggling scheme, but some of them may have returned. There are also thirty or forty underlings who should be located and checked up on, and, in addition, we must not lose sight of the fact that new heads of the organization may have been smuggled into the United States. It is no simple task that I am setting you, Carnes, but I know that you and Bolton will see it through if anyone can."

"Thanks, Doctor, we'll do our best. If I am not speaking out of turn, what are you planning to do in the mean time?"

"I am going to start Taylor off on an ultra-short wave generator and try a few experiments along that line. Breslau is at Walter Reed and they are doing all they can for him, but until I can get some definite information as to the underlying cause of his condition, they are more or less shooting in the dark."

"How are they treating him?"

"By electric stimulations and vibratory treatments and by keeping him in a darkened room. By the way, Carnes, if I am correct in my line of thought, it would be well to have an extra guard put over Karuska. He was the only real expert in ordnance that the Young Labor party had, and if they have Breslau's model they'll need him to supervise the construction of a gun."

"I'll attend to that at once, Doctor. Is there anything else?"

"Not that I know of. I am going out to Takoma Park this afternoon and have another look at Breslau, but it is too soon to hope for any change in his condition."

Aside from the time I will be out there, you can find me either here or at my home, in case anything develops."

"I'll get on the job at once, Doctor."

"Thanks, old dear. Remember that speed must be the keynote of your work."

The telephone bell at the head of Dr. Bird's bed woke into noisy activity. The doctor roused himself and took down the instrument sleepily. A glance at the clock showed him that it was four in the morning and he muttered a malediction on the one who had called him.

"Hello," he said into the receiver. "Dr. Bird speaking."

"Doctor," came a crisp voice over the wire, "wake up! This is Carnes talking. Something has broken loose!"

All trace of sleep vanished from Dr. Bird's face and his eyes glowed momentarily with a peculiar glitter which Carnes would at once have recognized as indicative of

the keenest interest.

"What has happened, Carnes?" he demanded.

"I telephoned Atlanta this morning and arranged to have an extra guard put over Karuska as you suggested. The matter was simplified by the fact that he and nine others were confined in the prison infirmary. The warden agreed to do as I told him, and, in addition to the regular guards, a special man was placed in the ward near Karuska's bed. At 2 A. M. the lights in the ward went out."

"Accidentally, or were they put out?"

"They haven't found out yet. At any rate they are all right now, but Karuska and all of the other inmates and all the guards of that particular ward have gone crazy."

"The dickens you say!"

"Not only that, they are also partially paralyzed. The description I got over the telephone corresponds

exactly with the condition of Lieutenant Breslau as you described it to me. Here is the most interesting part of the whole affair. The special guard over Karuska was only lightly affected and has already recovered and is in a position to tell you exactly what happened. I got a garbled account of the affair from the warden, something about a goldfish bowl or something like that, the warden wouldn't take it seriously enough to give me details. I didn't press for them much for I knew that you would rather get them at first hand."

"I certainly would. I'll be ready to leave for Atlanta in less than ten minutes."

"I expected that, Doctor, and a car is already on its way to pick you up. I'll meet you at Langley Field where a plane is already being tuned up and will be ready to take off by the time we get there."

"Good work, Carnes. I'll see you at the field."

A car was waiting for Carnes and Dr. Bird when the Langley Field plane slid down to a landing at Atlanta.

At the penitentiary, Dr. Bird went direct to the infirmary where Karuska had been confined. As he entered, he shot a keen glance around and gave an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Look at the windows, Carnes," he cried.

Carnes went over to the nearest window and moistened his finger tip and applied it experimentally to the glass. The moisture produced no effect, for the glass of the windows was permanently clouded as was that of the doctor's laboratory.

"Whatever happened in my laboratory the night before last was repeated here last night with a similar object," said the doctor. "The object there was to steal a gun model; here it was to steal a man who could construct a full-sized gun from the model. I understand that one of the guards escaped the fate which overtook the rest of the persons in the infirmary?"

"Not altogether, Doctor," replied the warden. "I think that his mind is somewhat affected, for he tells a wild

yarn and insists on trying to wear a goldfish bowl on his head. I have him under observation in the psychopathic ward."

Dr. Bird shot a scornful glance at the warden.

"'There are none so blind as those who will not see'," he murmured.

"By all means, I wish to see him," he went on aloud.
"Will you have him brought here at once, please?"

The warden nodded and spoke to one of the attendants. In a few moments a tall, fair-haired young giant stood before the doctor. Dr. Bird pushed back his unruly shock of black hair with his fingers, those long slim mobile fingers which alone betrayed the artist in his make-up, and shot a piercing glance from his black eyes into the blue ones, which returned the gaze unabashed.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Bailey, sir."

"You were on guard here last night?"

"Yes, sir. I was detailed as a special guard over No. 9764."

"Tell me in your own words just what happened. Don't be afraid to speak out; I'm not going to disbelieve you; and above all, tell me everything, no matter how unimportant it may seem to you. I'll judge the importance of things for myself. I'm Dr. Bird of the Bureau of Standards."

The guard's face lighted up at the doctor's words.

"I've heard of you, Doctor," he said in a relieved tone, "and I'll be glad to tell you everything. At ten o'clock last night, I relieved Carragher as special guard over No. 9764. Carragher reported that the prisoner was somewhat restless and hadn't been asleep as yet. I sat down about fifteen feet from his bed and prepared to keep an eye on him until I was relieved at six o'clock this morning.

"Nothing happened until about two o'clock. No. 9764

was restless as Carragher had said, but toward midnight he quieted down and apparently went to sleep. I was sleepy myself, and I got up and took a turn around the room every five minutes to be sure that I kept awake. That's how I am so sure of the time, sir."

Dr. Bird nodded.

"At five minutes to two, just as I got up, I heard a noise outside like a big electric fan. It sounded like it came from directly overhead and I went to the window and looked out. I couldn't see anything, although I could hear it pretty plainly, and then I heard a noise like something had fallen on the roof. Almost at the same time there came a sort of high-pitched whine, a good deal like the noise an electric motor makes when it is running at high speed.

"I thought of giving an alarm, but I didn't want to stir things up unless I was sure that there was some necessity for it, so I started for the door to ask one of the outside guards if he had heard anything. As I turned toward No. 9764 I saw that he had been

sitting up in bed while my back was turned. As soon as he saw that I noticed him, he lay back real quick and pulled the covers over his head. He moved pretty quick, but not so quick that I couldn't see that he had something that glittered like glass before his face. I started over toward his bed to see what he was doing and then it was that the lights started to get dim!"

"Go on!" said the doctor as Bailey paused. His eyes were glittering brightly now.

"Well, sir, Doctor, I don't hardly know how to describe what happened next. The lights were getting dim, but not as they ordinarily do when the current starts to go off. The filaments were shining as bright as they ever did, but the light didn't seem to be able to penetrate the air. The whole room seemed to be filled with a blackness that stopped the light. No, sir, it wasn't like fog; it was more like something more powerful than the lights was in the room and was killing them.

"It wasn't only the lights which were affected, it was me as well. This blackness, whatever it was, was getting into me as well as into the room, and I

couldn't seem to make myself think like I wanted to. I tried to yell to give an alarm, and I found that I could hardly whisper. I went toward the bed and then I saw No. 9764 sit up again. He had a goldfish bowl pulled down over his head and it was evident that it was keeping the blackness away, for I could see him plainly and his eyes were as bright as ever.

"The nearer I got to him, the funnier I felt, and I began to be afraid that I would go out. No. 9764 got up out of bed, and I could see him grinning at me through the bowl. He reached up and adjusted that bowl, and all of a sudden I realized that whatever was knocking me out was not affecting him because he had that thing on. I jumped for him with the idea of taking the bowl off and putting it on my own head. He saw what I was up to and he fought like a cornered rat, but the blackness hadn't affected my muscles. I'm a pretty big man, sir, and No. 9764 is a little runt, and it didn't take me long to get the bowl off his head and pulled on over mine. As soon as I did that, I seemed to be able to think clearer. I was sitting on No. 9764 and was ready to tap him with a persuader if he started

anything, but I didn't have to. In a few minutes he stopped struggling and lay perfectly quiet.

"The lights kept getting dimmer and dimmer until they went out altogether and the room became pitch dark. It wasn't exactly as if the lights had gone out, sir; I seemed to know that they were still there and were burning as bright as ever, but they couldn't penetrate the blackness in the room, if you understand what I mean."

"I think I do," said Dr. Bird slowly. "It was a good deal as if you had seen a glass filled with a pale red liquid and someone had dumped black ink into the fluid and hid the red color. You would know that the red was still there, but you wouldn't be able to see it through the black."

"That's exactly what it was like, Doctor; you have described it better than I can. At any rate, after it got real dark I heard a low whistle from the roof. No. 9764 made a struggle to get up for a moment and then lay quiet again. The whistle sounded again and then I heard some one call 'Caruso.' Everything was

quiet for a while and then the same voice called again and said some stuff in a foreign language that I couldn't understand. I kept perfectly quiet to see what would happen.

"For about ten minutes the room remained perfectly dark, as I have said, and all the while I could hear that whining noise. All of a sudden it began to sound in a lower note and then I could see the lights again, very dimly and like the black ink you spoke of was fading out. The note got lower until it stopped altogether, and the lights came on brighter until they were normal again. Then I heard a scraping noise on the roof and the noise I had heard at first like a big electric fan. I looked at the clock. It was two-twenty.

"For a few minutes I wasn't able to collect my wits. When I got up off of No. 9764 at last he stared at me as though he didn't know a thing, and I heaved him back into his bed and ran to the door to summon an outside guard. I could still talk in a husky whisper, but not loud, and I wasn't surprised when no one heard me. My orders were not to let No. 9764 out of my sight, but this was an emergency, so I left the ward

and found a guard. It was Madigan and he was standing on his beat staring at nothing. When I touched him he looked at me and there was the same vacant look in his eyes that I had seen in the prisoner's. I talked to him in a whisper, but he didn't seem to understand, so I left him and went to a telephone and called for help. Mr. Lawson, the warden, got here with guards in a couple of minutes and I tried to tell him what had happened, but I couldn't talk loud, and I was afraid to take the fish bowl off my head."

"What happened next?"

"Mr. Lawson took me to his office, and on the way we passed under an arc light. As soon as I got under it I begin to feel better, and my voice came stronger. I saw that it was doing me some good and I stopped under it for an hour before my voice got back to normal. It seemed to clear the fog from my brain, too, and I was able, about four o'clock, to tell everything that had happened. Mr. Lawson seemed to think that my brain was affected as well as the others' and he sent me to the hospital. That's all, Doctor."

"Do you feel perfectly normal now?"

"Yes, sir."

"There is no need for confining this man longer, Mr. Lawson. He is as well as he ever was. Carnes, get the Walter Reed Hospital on the telephone and tell them that I said to treat Lieutenant Breslau with light rays, rich in ultra-violet. Tell them to give him an overdose of them and not to put goggles on him. Keep him in the sun all day and under sun-ray arcs at night until further orders. Mr. Lawson, give the same treatment to the men who were disabled last night. If you haven't enough sun-ray arcs in your hospital, put them under an ordinary arc light in the yard. Bailey, have you still got that goldfish bowl?"

"It is in my office, Doctor," said the warden.

"Good enough! Send for it at once. By the way, you have two more communists here, Denberg and Semensky, haven't you?"

"I think so, although I will have to consult the records

before I can be positive."

"I am sure that you have. Look the matter up and let me know."

The warden hurried away to carry out the doctor's orders, and an orderly appeared in a few moments with a hollow globe made of some crystalline transparent substance. Despite its presence in the infirmary the evening before, there was no trace of clouding apparent. Dr. Bird took it and examined it critically. He rapped it with his knuckles and then stepped to the door and hurled it violently down on the concrete floor of the yard. The globe rebounded without injury and he caught it.

"Vitrilene, or a good imitation of it," he remarked to Carnes. "After you get through talking to the hospital, get Taylor on the wire. There is plenty of loose vitrilene in the Bureau, and I want him to send down about fifty square feet of it by a special plane at once."

As Carnes left the room, the warden reappeared.

"The men are all lying in the sun now, Doctor," he said. "I find that we have the two men you mentioned confined here. They are both in Tier A, Building 6."

"Is that an isolated building?"

"No, it is one wing of the old main building."

"On which floor?"

"The second floor. It is a six-story building."

"Have they been moved there recently?"

"They have been there for nearly a year."

"In that case there will be little chance of another attack of this sort to-night. At the same time, I would advise you to station extra guards there to-night and every night until I notify you otherwise. Caution them to watch the lights carefully and to give an alarm at once if they appear to get dim. In such a case, send men to the roof with rifles with orders to shoot to kill anyone they find there. I am going back to

Washington and I am going to take Karuska, your No. 9764 with me. You had better have one of the guards in the corridor, where Denberg and Semensky are, wear this goldfish bowl, as you call it. A lot of plate glass—at least it will look like that—will come from Washington by plane. Cut it into sheets a foot square and use surgeon's plaster to make some temporary glass helmets for your men. I want all your guards to wear them until I either settle this matter or else send you some better helmets. Do you understand?"

"I understand all right, but I'm afraid that I can't do it. The wearing of such appliances would interfere with the efficiency of my men as guards."

"Brain and tongue paralysis would interfere rather more seriously, it seems to me. In any event, I have sufficient authority to enforce my request. If you are at all doubtful, call up the Attorney General and ask him."

The warden hesitated.

"If you don't mind, I think I will call Washington,

Doctor," he said. "I will have to get authority to turn No. 9764 over to you in any event."

"Call all you wish, Mr. Lawson. Mr. Carnes is talking to Washington now and we'll have a clear line through for you in a few minutes. Meanwhile, get a set of shackles on Karuska and get him ready to travel by plane. He appears to be suffering from mental paralysis, but I don't know how his case will develop. He may go violently insane at any moment and I don't care to be aloft in a plane with an unbound maniac."

Major Martin looked up from the prone figure of Karuska.

"His condition duplicates that of Lieutenant Breslau, Dr. Bird," he said. "We received your telephoned message this afternoon and we kept Breslau in a flood of sunlight until dusk, and then put him under sun-ray lamps. I don't know how you got on to that treatment, but it is having a very beneficial effect. He can already make inarticulate sounds, and his eyes are not quite as vacant as they were. If he keeps on improving as he has, he should be able to talk

intelligently in a few days. If you wish to question this man, why not give him the same treatment?"

"I haven't time, Major. I must make him talk to-night if it is humanly possible. I called you in because you are the most eminent authority on the brain in the government service. Is there any way of artificially stimulating this man's brain so that we can force the secrets of his subconscious mind from him?"

The major sat for a moment in profound thought.

"There *is* a way, Doctor," he said at length, "but it is a method which I would not dare to use. By applying high frequency electrical stimulations to the medulla oblongata, at the same time bathing the cerebellum with ultra-violet, it might be done, but the chances are that either death or insanity would result. I would not do it."

"Major Martin, this man is a reckless and dangerous international criminal. If his gang carries out the plan which I fear they have formed, the lives of thousands, yes, of millions, may pay for your hesitation. I will

assume full responsibility for the test if you will make it, and I have the authority of the President of the United States behind me."

"In that case, Doctor, I have no choice. The President is the Commander-in-chief of the army, and if those are his orders the experiment will be carried out. As a matter of form, I will ask that your orders be reduced to writing."

"I will write them gladly, Major. Please proceed with the experiment without delay."

Major Martin bowed and spoke to a waiting orderly. The prostrate figure of Karuska was wheeled down a corridor into the electrical laboratory, and with the aid of the laboratory technician the surgeon made his preparations. The Moss lamp was arranged to throw a flood of ultra-violet over the Russian's cranium while the leads from a deep therapy X-ray tube was connected, one to the front of Karuska's throat and the other to the base of his brain. At a signal from the major, a nurse began to administer ether.

"I guarantee nothing, Dr. Bird," said the major. "The paralysis of the vocal cords may be physical, in which case the victim will still be unable to speak, regardless of the brain stimulation. If, however, the evident paralysis is due to some obscure influence on the brain, it may work."

"In any, event I will hold you blameless and thank you for your help," replied the doctor. "Please start the stimulation."

Major Martin closed a switch, and the hum of a high tension alternator filled the laboratory. The Russian quivered for a moment and then lay still. Major Martin nodded and Dr. Bird stepped to the side of the operating table.

"Ivan Karuska," he said slowly and distinctly, "do you hear me?"

The Russian's lips quivered and an unintelligible murmur came from them.

"Ivan Karuska," repeated Dr. Bird, "do you hear me?"

There was a momentary struggle on the part of the Russian and then a surprisingly clear voice came from his lips.

"I do."

"Who is the present head of the Young Labor party?"

Again there was a pause before the name "Saranoff" came from the lips of the insensible figure. Carnes gave a sharp exclamation but a gesture from the doctor silenced him.

"Is Saranoff alive?"

"Yes."

"Is he in the United States?"

"No, he is in London."

"Is he coming to the United States?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"I don't know. Soon. As soon as we are ready for him."

"Where is he living in London?"

"I don't know."

"How did you get word that you were to be rescued from Atlanta?"

"A message was smuggled in to me by O'Grady, a guard in our pay."

"What was that vitrilene helmet for?"

"To protect me from the effects of the black lamp."

"What is the black lamp?"

"I don't know exactly. Saranoff invented it. It gives a black light and it kills all other light except sunlight, and it paralyses the brain."

"Did you know that the model of the Breslau gun had

been stolen?"

"Yes."

"What were you going to do after you were rescued from jail?"

"I was going to make a full-sized gun. We have a disappearing gun platform built in the swamps at the juncture of the Potomac and Piscataway Creek. The gun was to be mounted there and we would shell Washington and institute a reign of terror. It would be a signal for uprisings all over the country."

"Is there a black lamp at that gun platform?"

"Yes. The black lamp will kill both the flash and the report."

"Where did you get the formula for radite?"

"We got it from one of Dr. Bird's assistants. His name —"

As he spoke the last few sentences, Karuska's voice had steadily risen almost to a shriek. As he endeavored to give the name of the doctor's treacherous helper his voice changed to an unintelligible screech and then died away into silence. Major Martin stepped forward and bent over the prone figure. Hurriedly he tore away the electrical connections and placed a stethoscope over the Russian's heart. He listened for a moment and then straightened up, his face pale.

"I hope that the information you obtained is worth a life, Dr. Bird," he said, his voice trembling slightly, "because it has cost one."

"It may easily save thousands of lives. I thank you, Major, and I will see that no blame attaches to you for your actions. I only wish that he had lived long enough to tell me the name of my assistant who has sold me to Saranoff. However, we'll get that information in other ways. Carnes, telephone Lawson at Atlanta to slam O'Grady into a cell pending investigation while I get Camp Meade on the wire and order up a couple of tanks. We are going to attack

that gun emplacement at daybreak."

The telephone bell in the laboratory jangled sharply. Major Martin answered it and turned to Carnes.

"You're wanted on the telephone, Mr. Carnes."

The detective stepped forward and took the transmitter.

"Carnes speaking," he said. "Yes. Oh, hello, Bolton. Yes, we have Karuska here, or rather his body. Yes, Dr. Bird is here right now. You've what? Great Scott, wait a minute."

"Dr. Bird," he cried eagerly turning from the telephone, "Bolton has located the Washington headquarters of the Young Labor party."

Dr. Bird sprang to the instrument.

"Bird speaking, Bolton," he cried. "You've located their headquarters? Who's running it? Stanesky, eh? You're on the right track; he used to be Saranoff's

right hand man. Where is the place located? I don't seem to recollect the spot. You have it well surrounded? Where are you speaking from? All right, we'll join you as quickly as we can. Keep your patrols out and don't let anyone get away."

He hung up the receiver and turned to Carnes.

"Did you have the car wait?" he asked. "Good enough; we'll jump for the Bureau and pick up all the vitrilene laying around loose and then join Bolton. He thinks that he has the whole outfit bottled up."

Bolton was waiting as the car rolled up and Dr. Bird leaped out.

"Where are they?" demanded the doctor eagerly.

"In an abandoned factory building about three hundred yards from here," replied the Chief of the Secret Service. "I traced them through New York. We have been watching the place ever since yesterday noon, and I know that Stanesky is in there with half a dozen others. No one has tried to leave since we set

our watch. One funny thing has happened. About an hour ago a peculiar red glow suffused the whole building. It has died down a good deal since, but we can still see it through the windows. Could you tell us what it means?"

"No. I couldn't, Bolton, but we'll find out. How many men have you?"

"I have sixteen stationed around."

"That's more than we'll need. I have only vitrilene shields and helmets enough to equip six men. Pick out your three best men to go with us and we'll make a try at entering."

Bolton strode off into the darkness and returned in a few moments with three men at his heels. Dr. Bird spoke briefly to the operatives, all of them men who had been his companions on other adventures. He explained the need for the vitrilene helmets and shields, and without comment the six donned their armor and followed Bolton as he strode toward the building. As they approached, a dull red glow could

be plainly seen through the windows, and Dr. Bird paused and studied the phenomenon for a moment.

"I don't know what that means, Bolton," he said softly, "but I don't like the looks of it. Stanesky is up to some devilment or other. I wouldn't be a bit surprised to find out that he knows all about your pickets and is ready for a raid."

"We'd better rush the place, then," muttered Bolton.

Dr. Bird nodded agreement and with a sharp command to his men Bolton broke into a run. Not a shot was fired as they approached, and the front door gave readily to Bolton's touch. At it opened there came a grating sound from the roof followed by the whir of a propeller. Dr. Bird ran out of the building and glanced up.

"A helicopter!" he cried. "They were expecting us and have escaped!"

He drew his pistol and fired ineffectually at the great bird-like ship which was rising almost noiselessly into

the air. He cursed and turned again to the building.

Bolton still stood in the room which they had first entered. His flashlight showed it to be empty, but from under a door on the opposite side a line of dull red light glowed evilly. With his pistol ready in his hand, Bolton approached the door on hands and knees. When he reached it he threw his shoulder against it and dropped flat to the floor as the door swung open. No shot greeted him, and he stared for a moment and then rose to his feet.

"Nothing in here but some glass statues," he announced.

Dr. Bird followed him into the room. As he looked at what Bolton had called glass statues he gasped and shielded his eyes.

"God in Heaven!" he ejaculated. "Those were living men!"

Before them were three men or what had been three men. All stood in strained attitudes with a look of

horror frozen on their faces. The thing that made the spectators shudder was that their bodies had, by some diabolical method, been rendered semi-transparent. The dull red light which suffused the room emanated from the three bodies. Dr. Bird examined them closely, being careful not to touch them.

"The identity of my treacherous assistant is known," he said grimly as he pointed at the middle figure. "It was Gerond. What is this?"

He took an envelope from the hand of the middle figure and opened it. A sheet of paper fell out and he picked it up and read it.

"My dear Mr. Bolton," ran the note. "Your methods of tracing and picketing my headquarters are so crude as to be almost laughable. This base has served its purpose and we were ready to abandon it in any event, but I couldn't resist the temptation to let you almost nab us. The three men whom you will find here are agents who failed in their duty. If you are interested in learning the method of their execution,

you might take to heart the words of your colleague, Dr. Bird: 'The clue lies in those windows.'"

Carnes glanced at the windows and gave a cry of surprise. The glass was opaque, as had been the glass in the doctor's laboratory and the glass in the infirmary at Atlanta. The fogging however, was much more pronounced, and the opaque glass gave faintly the same red effulgence which came from the three bodies.

"What does it mean, Doctor?" he asked.

"I don't know, Carnes," said Dr. Bird slowly. "I foresee that I am going to have to do a great deal of work on short wave-lengths soon. It is doubtless the effect of some modification of the black lamp which has done it. Look out!"

He leaped to one side as he spoke, drawing Bolton and Carnes with him. A panel in the side of the wall opposite the doorway had slid silently open and through the opening poured out a beam of fiery red. Full on the three bodies it fell, and then spread out to

fill the room. Dr. Bird had drawn the two nearest men out of the direct beam, but one of the secret service men stood full in its path. In the excitement of entering he had dropped his vitrilene shield and the livid ray fell full on his defenceless body. As they watched an expression of horror spread over his face and he strove to move to one side, but he was held helpless. Slowly he stiffened; and, as the ray bored through him, his body became semi-transparent and the same dull red glow which emanated from the three bodies they had found began to shine forth from him. Bolton strove to break from the doctor's grasp and rush to the rescue but Dr. Bird held him with a grip of iron.

"Too late," he said grimly. "Chalk up another murder to the arch fiend who has committed the others. I don't know the nature of that ray and vitrilene may not be an adequate defence against its full force. We had better get out of here and attack the place from the rear."

Carefully edging their way around the sides of the room, the five men made their way out through the

door. Dr. Bird slammed the door shut behind him and led the way out of the building and around to the rear. A door loomed before them and he cautiously tried it. It gave to his touch and he entered. As he set his foot on the threshold a terrific explosion came from the interior of the building.

"Run!" he shouted as he led the way in retreat. "If that is a radite explosion it will act for several seconds!"

From a safe distance they watched. One corner of the building had been torn off by the force of the explosion, and as they watched the rest of the building gradually collapsed and sank into a pile of ruins.

"They had planned on a visit from us all right," said Dr. Bolton grimly. "They had a surprise for us any way we jumped. If we went in the front door, that devil's ray was to finish us, and if we went in the back door the whole place was arranged to blow up as we entered. I only hope that Stanesky thinks that he has got us all and doesn't expect an attack on his next

base in the morning. If he doesn't, I think we may give him a rather unpleasant surprise. Of course, that lamp is smashed into atoms and buried under the debris, but I don't know what other devil's contraptions that ruin holds. Bolton, have your men picket it and allow no one near until I get back. I've got to get to a telephone and get a couple of tanks from Meade and a plane or two from Langley Field."

Two tanks made their way slowly across country. The front of each tank was protected by a heavy sheet of vitrilene, while from the turrets of the tanks projected the wicked looking muzzles of thirty-seven millimeter guns. Overhead two airplanes from Langley Field soared, scouting the country. Dr. Bird and Carnes rode in the leading tank.

"It ought to be somewhere near here, unless Karuska lied," said Carnes as he swept the country with a pair of binoculars.

"He didn't lie," returned Dr. Bird. "It was his subconscious mind that spoke and it never lies. He spoke of the gun emplacement as being in a swamp

and I have a strong idea that it is submersible. Of course, it is bound to be well camouflaged, both from land and from air observation."

The planes circled around again and again, quartering the air like a pair of well-trained bird dogs will quarter a hunting field. First high and then low they swooped back and forth, the tanks lumbering slowly along in the same direction. Presently the occupants of the leading tank saw one of the planes bank sharply and swing around. It dropped to an altitude of only a few hundred feet and turned and went back over the ground it had just crossed.

"I believe that fellow sees something!" exclaimed Carnes.

As he spoke, three green Very lights came from the cockpit of the plane. The tank driver gave a grunt of satisfaction and turned the nose of his vehicle in that direction. The second tank followed.

Hardly had they turned in the new direction before the ground began to get soft under their tracks and

the heavy vehicles began to sink. The driver of the Doctor's tank forced it ahead, but the tank sank deeper in the mire until water flowed in around the feet of the occupants.

"I reckon we'll have to get out and walk pretty soon, Doctor," said the driver.

Dr. Bird grunted in acquiescence. The tank made its way forward a few yards before the engine sputtered and died. The second tank stopped when the first one did, fifty yards behind it. Donning vitrilene helmets and taking vitrilene shields in their hands, the crews of both tanks climbed out into the waist-deep water and gathered around the Doctor for orders.

"Form a skirmish line at ten-pace intervals and cross the swamp," he directed. "We may meet with no opposition, but if there is, the more scattered we are, the safer we will be. You all have hand grenades as well as your rifles?"

A murmur of assent answered him and the line formed and started across the swamp. They had gone

perhaps a hundred yards when three red lights came from one of the planes circling overhead.

"Down!" cried the doctor, dropping to his knees in the muck.

Four hundred yards ahead of them a concrete platform emerged from the marsh and rose slowly into the air. It was roofed with a dome of what looked like plate glass, but which the doctor shrewdly suspected was vitrilene. When the base of the platform was two-feet above the level of the water the dome slid silently aside disclosing two men bending over a tiny gun. Dr. Bird leveled his binoculars.

"That's the Breslau gun model that was stolen as sure as I'm a foot high!" he cried. "They must have made some miniature shells and be planning to fire it."

Slowly a pall of intense blackness rose from the marsh and enveloped the platform and hid it from view. A whining noise came from overhead, and then a crash like a thunderbolt. The blast of the explosion threw the attackers face down in the swamp, and

when they arose and looked back there was merely a gaping hole where the leading tank had been. The second tank suddenly seemed to rise in the air and fly into millions of tiny fragments, and a second thunderous blast sent them again to their knees.

"Radite!" bellowed Dr. Bird to Carnes. "Imagine the effect if that had been a full charge fired from a completed Breslau gun! Watch the planes, now. I think they are going to drop a few eggs on them."

The black mist cleared as if by magic and the platform was in plain view. The big glass dome rolled back into place as the two planes swept over at an elevation of two thousand feet. From each one a small black cigar-shaped object was released and fell in a long parabola toward the earth. The glass dome which had been closing over the gun platform rolled quickly back and a long beam of intense blackness pierced the heavens. First one and then the other of the falling bombs disappeared from view into it, and then the black column faded from view. The two bombs fell with increasing speed but the dome closed over the platform before they struck. The two hit the

dome at almost the same instant and instead of the blinding crash they expected, the watchers saw the bombs rebound from the dome and fall harmlessly into the water.

"Stymied!" muttered the doctor. "I wonder what other properties that confounded lamp has."

He resumed his advance, Carnes and the soldiers keeping abreast of him. When they were within two hundred yards of the platform it rose again and the transparent dome rolled back. A beam of black shot forth over the swamp, searching them out and hiding them from view. First one and then another felt the effects of the black beam; but the vitrilene which the Doctor had provided stood them in good stead, and, aside from a slight shortening of their breath, none of the attackers felt any the worse.

"Come on, men!" cried the Doctor as his athletic figure plowed forward through the breast-deep water. "That is their worst weapon and it is harmless against us!"

Cheering, they fought their way toward the platform. It sunk for a moment and then rose again. As the dome swung back a sharp crackle of machine-gun fire sounded and the water before them was whipped into foam by the plunging bullets. One of the soldiers gave a sharp cry and slumped forward into the water.

"Fire at will!" shouted the lieutenant in command.

A crackle of rifle fire answered the tattoo of the machine-gun, and the sharp ping of bullets striking on the dome could be plainly heard. An occasional shot kicked up a spurt of white dust from the concrete, but the machine-gun kept up a steady rattle of fire and the soldiers kept their heads almost at the level of the water. There came the roar of an airplane motor, and one of the planes swept over the platform, a hundred yards in the air, with two machine-guns spraying streams of bullets onto the platform. Two men abandoned their machine-gun and crouched under the partially folded-back dome as the second plane swept over, and Dr. Bird took advantage of the lull to advance his party a few yards nearer. Again the defenders of the platform rushed to their gun, but the

first plane had turned and swooped down with both guns going, and again they were forced to take shelter while the Doctor and his force made another advance.

The second plane had turned and followed the first, but the defenders had had enough. The transparent dome closed over them and the platform sank into the marsh. With a shout, Dr. Bird led the way forward again.

The attackers were within a hundred yards of the platform when it again rose above the surface of the water. The guns had disappeared, but in their place stood an airship. It was a small affair with stubby wings above which were two helicopter blades revolving at high speed. No sound of a motor could be heard.

The transparent dome rolled back and like a bullet the little craft shot into the air, followed by a futile volley from the soldiers. Hardly had it appeared than the two airplanes bore down on it with machine-guns going. The helicopter paid no attention to them for a

moment, and then came a puff of smoke from its side. The leading plane swerved sharply and the helicopter fired again. The leading plane maneuvered about, trying to get a machine-gun to bear, while the second plane climbed swiftly to get above the helicopter and pour a deadly stream of fire down into it. It gained position and swooped down to the attack, but another puff of smoke came from the side of the helicopter and there was a thunderous report and a blinding flash in the sky. As the smoke cleared away, no trace of the ill-fated plane could be seen. The helicopter hung motionless in the air as though daring the remaining plane to attack.

The plane accepted the challenge and bore down at full speed on the stranger. Again came a puff of smoke, but the plane swerved and an answering shot came from its side. It was above the helicopter, and the shell which missed its mark plunged to the ground. When it struck there came a roar and a flash and the whole earth seemed to shake. The helicopter shot upward into the air and forward, both its elevating fans and its propellers whirling blurs of

light. The airplane followed at its sharpest climbing angle, but was helpless to compete with its swifter climbing rival.

"He's got away!" groaned Carnes.

"Not yet, old dear!" cried the Doctor hopping with excitement. "He isn't safe yet. I never told you, but one Breslau gun had been made and it is on that plane. It has deadly accuracy and is good for fifteen miles. That's Lieutenant Dreen at the controls and Mason at the gun."

As he spoke the plane swung around and made a half loop. For a few yards it flew upside down and then whirled swiftly. As it turned there came a sharp report and a puff of smoke from its rear cockpit. High above, the helicopter had ceased climbing and hovered motionless. As the plane fired, the helicopter shot forward like an arrow from a bow, and thereby spelled its doom. Not for nothing did Captain Mason bear the title of the best aerial gunner in the Air Corps. He had foreseen what the action of his opponent would be and had allowed for just such a move. Far up in the

sky came a blinding flash and a cloud of smoke. When the smoke cleared the sky was empty, except for a little scattered debris falling slowly to the ground.

"And that's that!" exclaimed Dr. Bird as he finished his examination of the underground laboratory with which the gun platform connected. "The lamp has gone to glory with Breslau's gun model and two of the best brains of the Young Labor party. I am sure that Stanesky was one of those two men. I wish the whole gang had been on board."

"Don't you think that this is the end of it, Doctor?" asked Carnes.

"No, Carnes, I don't. We know that the real brains of this outfit is Saranoff, and Saranoff is still alive. He probably won't try to use his black lamp again, because I will have a defence against it in a short time, now that I have seen it in action, but he'll try something else. The whole object of life to a loyal citizen of Bolshevikia is to reduce the whole world to the barbarous level in which they hold Russia, and they will spare no pains or effort to accomplish it. The

greatest obstacle to their success at present is the President of the United States. He is loved and respected by the whole world, and if he is spared he will forge the world into a great machine for the preservation of peace and universal good will. That would be fatal to Bolshevikia's plans, and they will spare no effort to remove him. By the grace of God, we have saved him from harm so far, but until we remove Saranoff permanently from the scene, I will never feel safe for him."

"What do you suppose they'll try next, Doctor?"

"That, Carnes, time alone will tell."

72 Phalanxes of Atlans by Francis Van Wyck Mason

Only in dim legends did mankind remember Atlantis and the Lost Tribes—until Victor Nelson's extraordinary adventure in the unknown arctic.

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

grasshoppers



Victor Nelson violently forward to lie in the deep snow at the bottom of a tiny crevasse, down which the merciless gale moaned like an anguished demon.

"It's no use," he muttered bitterly. "We've fought hard, but we're done for."

He lay still, stupidly watching his breath form tiny beads of ice on the ends of the fur which lined his parka. Until that moment he had not realized how thoroughly exhausted he was. Every muscle of his starved, bruised body ached unbearably. It wasn't so bad lying there in the soft snow. He could rest, then look later for the ice hummock behind which the plane lay sheltered. Rest! That's what he needed, a good long rest.

But deep within him, a primal instinct stabbed his waning consciousness. "No," he gasped, and blinked his reddened eyes behind smoked goggles which dulled the shimmer of the aurora. "If I stop, I'll never get up."

Shaken by the terrific velocity of the arctic gale he

numbly clambered to his feet, then stooped with a stiff awkward motion to retrieve a Winchester rifle which lay half buried in the snow beside the blurred imprint of his body.

"Wonder if Alden had any better luck?" The question burned dully in his brain. "Don't suppose so; there can't be anything alive in this God-awful wilderness." As he stumbled on he found no answer in an unbroken vista of wind-scored ice and drifting snow that, swirling high into the air, momentarily cut off the view of that black line of ice-capped mountains barely visible on the horizon.

"Yes, if he hasn't found anything, we'll be dead or frozen stiff before to-morrow."

His soul—that of a true explorer—revolted, not at the thought of death, but that his and Alden's courageously won discovery of a majestic mountain range towering high over a polar region marked "unexplored" on the maps would now never be made public.

Leaning forward against the merciless icy blast he painfully picked his way over a treacherous ice ridge, to be faintly encouraged by the fact that the towerlike hummock of ice marking the position of the plane now lay but a few hundred yards ahead.

Bitterly he cursed that demon of ill-fortune who had sent the blinding snow storm which had forced down the plane ten long days ago at the very beginning of its triumphant return flight to the base at Cape Richards. Since that hour the storm gods had emptied the vials of their wrath upon the luckless explorers. Day after day, cyclonic winds made all thought of a take-off suicidal in the extreme. Three days ago the last of their food had given out, and, he mused, starvation is an ill companion for despair.

Slip, slide and fall! On he fought until the final barrier was reached and he stood staring hopelessly down into a small natural amphitheater which sheltered the great monoplane. The ship was still there, its engine snuggled in a canvas shroud and with the soft, dry snow banked up high in the lee of its silver gray fuselage. Numbly, like a man in the grip of a painful

coma, Nelson shielded his face with a furry hand to scan the surrounding terrain. "Hell!" The door block of the igloo they had built was still snowed up; Alden was not there!

"He's not back," he muttered, while his body swayed beneath the gale which smote him with fierce, unseen fists. "Poor devil, I hope he hasn't lost the way."

All the bitterness of undeserved defeat stung his soul as he started down the incline into the hollow.

Suddenly he paused. The rifle flew into the ready position and his chilled thumb drew back the hammer. "What's this?" On the snow at his feet was a bright, scarlet splash, dreadfully distinct against the white background. While his dazed brain struggled to register what his eyes saw, he looked to the right and left and discovered several more of the hideous spots. Then an object that gleamed dully in the polar twilight attracted his attention. He lumbered forward, stooped stiffly and caught up a long, half round strip of bronze.

"What? Why? Oh—I'm crazy. I'm seeing things!" The pain in his empty stomach was now becoming excruciating. To steady himself he shut his eyes, shook his head as though to clear it, then looked again at that strip of metal in his hand. Attached to it were two slender strips of leather like straps, ending in small, bronze buckles.

"Why, it's not from the plane," he stammered aloud. "Damned if it doesn't look like a greave the old Greek warriors used to wear to protect their shins."

Suddenly alarmed and mystified beyond words, he shuffled forward over the snow, the greave yet clutched in a fur gloved hand. Presently two more objects, already half buried by the stinging, swirling drifts, caught his attention. One was the stock of Alden's rifle, protruding starkly brown from the unrelieved whiteness, and the other was a broken wooden shaft that ended a graceful but wickedly sharp bronze spear head.

"I've either gone crazy," he said, "or I'm delirious. Yes, I must be clean nutty! There *couldn't* be a human

settlement within a thousand miles. Let's see what's happened."

On the snow of a little wind-sheltered space behind the igloo he discovered the unmistakable and ominous signs of a struggle. An indefinite number of footprints, blurred but enormous in size, were marked in the snow. Here and there deep furrows mutely testified how Alden and the enemies against whom he struggled had reeled back and forth in vicious combat over a considerable area. Then, shaken by a new fear, he discovered Alden's left glove and a rag of some peculiar thick material that seemed to have a metallic finish. But what aroused his gravest fears were the numerous splashes of blood that here and there streaked the snow in gruesome relief.

Only a moment Nelson stood, shaken by the merciless wind, scanning the piece of bronzed armor between his gloved hands with a fresh interest. It was beautifully fashioned, and decorated at the knee point with the wonderfully wrought figure of a dolphin.

If he could only think clearly! But his brain seemed to

lie in a red-hot skull. "Whatever's happened," he muttered, "I'd better not waste time; they couldn't have been here so long ago. Poor Alden! I wonder what kind of devils caught him?"

Even before he had finished the sentence the aviator had taken up the partially obliterated trail of spattered blood drops. That what he sought appeared to be a marauding party of giants restrained him not at all. The one clear thought burning in his weary brain was that Richard Alden, his best friend—the man with whom he had traveled over half the world, by whose side he had faced many a perilous situation—must at that moment lie in peril, the extent of which he could only surmise.

"Must have been about a dozen of them," he said thickly. And, holding the Winchester ready, he commenced once more to plod on through the stinging sheets of wind-driven ice particles. More than once he had great difficulty in not losing that crimson trail, for here and there the restless, white crystals completely blotted out the splashes.

All at once Nelson checked his pathetically slow progress, finding himself on the top of an eminence, looking down in what appeared to be a vastly deep natural amphitheater of snow and ice. At the bottom, and perhaps a hundred yards distant, was a curious black oval from which appeared to rise a dense, wind-whipped column of whitish vapor.

"My eyes must be going back on me," muttered Nelson through stiffened lips. How intolerably heavy his fur suit seemed! His strength was about gone and that curious black mouthlike circle seemed infinitely far away. But, spurred by fears for his friend, he started downward for the precipitious trail leading directly towards it.

Once he stepped inside the crater, he became conscious of a terrific side pressure which gripped him as a whirlpool seizes a luckless swimmer. The wind buffeted him from all angles, dealing him powerful blows on face and body, which, too strong for his weary body, sent him reeling weakly, drunkenly across the hard, glare ice towards the vortex. Twice he slipped, each time finding it harder to arise. But at

last he approached what on closer inspection proved to be a subterranean vent of black rock.

"Steam!" he gasped. "It's steam coming out of there!"

Swayed by a dozen conflicting emotions, he paused, the Winchester barrel wavering like a reed in his enfeebled grasp.

"The whole thing's crazy," he decided. "I must be frozen and lying somewhere, delirious. Poor Dick! Can't help him much now."

Like a man in a nightmare who advances but feels nothing under his feet, Nelson staggered on towards that huge, gaping aperture of black rock. On the threshold a pool of melted snow water made him stare.

"Hell!" he said. "It's only a volcanic vent of some kind." Then dimly came the recollection of Eskimo legends concerning thermal springs beyond the desolate and unknown reaches of Grant Land.

His mind in an indescribable turmoil, Nelson splashed across a hundred yards of sodden snow, then shivered on wading knee deep through a pool of melted ice. Now he stood on the very threshold of that awful opening, dense clouds of vapor beating warmly against his chilled features.

His goggles fogged at once, blinding him effectively as, with reason staggering under the accumulated stress of starvation and the circumstances of Alden's disappearance, he groped his way a few feet into the vent. With his left hand he pulled up the glasses from his sunken, blood-shot eyes.

"It's warm, by God!" he cried in astonishment as the skin exposed by lifting the goggles came in contact with the air. "Must be some kind of earth-warmed cave."

Increasingly mystified, he caught up his rifle and strode on down the passage, at that moment illuminated by the last unearthly rays of the aurora borealis. A single, dazzling beam played before him like a powerful searchlight, to light a high vaulted

tunnel of basalt rocks which were distorted by some long-gone convulsion of the earth into a hundred weird cleavages and faults. For that brief instant he found he could see perhaps a hundred feet down into a high roofed passage, along the top of which poured a tremendous stream of billowing, writhing steam.

"If this doesn't beat all," he murmured; but for all of his apprehension he did not pause. Those bloody splashes bespeaking Alden's pressing need urged him on. "Looks like I'm taking a one way trip into Hell itself. Well, we'll soon see."

Slipping and sliding over an almost impassable array of black rocks and boulders, Nelson fought his way forward, conscious that with every stride the air grew damper and warmer. Soon trickles of sweat were pouring down over his chest, tickling unbearably.

Then all at once the ray of light faded, leaving him immersed in a blackness equalled only by the gloom of a subterranean vault. He stopped and, resting his rifle against a nearby invisible rock, threw back the parka hood and pulled off his gloves. He was amazed

to feel how warm the strong air current was on his hands.

"Beats all," he muttered heavily. "I wonder where they've taken Alden?"

Meanwhile his hands groped through fur garments now wet with melted-snow and ice particles, searching for the catch to open that pocket in which lay a small but powerful electric flashlight, an instrument without which no far-flying aviator finds himself. After a moment's fumbling, his yet stiffened fingers encountered the cylindrical flash and, with a low cry of satisfaction, he drew it forth to press the button.

"Mighty useful. I—" The words stopped, frozen on his lips. Before the parka edge his close cropped hair seemed to rise, and his breath stopped midway in his lungs. Sharp electric shocks shook him, for there, half revealed in the feeble flashlight's glare, was a sight which shook his sanity to the snapping point. Not fifty feet away two eyes, large as dinner plates, with narrow vertical red irises, were trained on him.

Rooted to the ground by the paralysis of utter horror, Nelson saw that their color was a weird, unhealthy, greenish white, rather like the color of a radio-light watch dial.

Strangely intense, these huge orbs wavered not at all, filling him with an unnameable dread, while the strong odor of musk assailed his nostrils. The flashlight slipped from between Nelson's fingers and, no longer having his thumb on the button, flickered out.

Helpless, Nelson stood transfixed against a boulder, aware that the strange, musky scent was becoming stronger. Then to his ears came a dry scrabbling as of some large body stealthily advancing. Those horrible, unearthly eyes were coming nearer! Fierce, terrible shocks of fear gripped the exhausted aviator. Then the impulse of self-preservation, that most elementary of all instincts, forced him to snatch up the rifle, to sight hastily, blindly, between those two, great greenish eyes. Choking out a strangled sob of desperation, Nelson made his trembling finger close over the cold strip of steel that must be the trigger.

Like a stage trick, the cavern was momentarily lit by a strong, orange yellow glare. Then the Winchester's report thundered and roared deafeningly; coincidentally arose a nerve-shattering scream. An exhalation, foul as a corpse long unburied, fanned his face. Terrified, he flattened to the rock wall as a huge, though dangerously agile body hurtled by with the speed of a runaway horse. Presently followed the sound of a ponderous fall, then a series of shrill, ear-piercing gibberings and squeakings, like those of a titanic rat—squeaks that rang like the chorus of Hell itself. Gradually they grew fainter, while in the darkness the heavy air of the tunnel became rank with the odor of clotting blood.

Nelson remained where he was, shaking like a frightened horse and bathed with a cold sweat.

"Wonder what it was?" he muttered numbly.

He broke off, for in the terrible darkness sounded a low but perfectly audible *thud! thud! thud! thud!*—and also the subtle noise of some rough surface rasping gently over the stone. His nerves crisped and

shrieked for relief.

"It's coming again!" he told himself, and ejected the spent cartridge from the Winchester. "No use—it'll get me, but I may as well fight as long as I can."

Even stronger grew the musty smell of blood while that uncanny *thud! thud!* sound continued at regular intervals. Nelson waited, breath halted and finger on trigger, but still the darkness yielded no glimpse of those awful saucer-like eyes.

Emboldened, he stooped and, jerking off his left glove, commenced to grope among the boulders. Somewhere near at his feet the flashlight must be lying. Hoping against hope that its fall had not shattered the bulb, he ran his fingers over the cold, damp stones, every instant expecting to feel the clutch of the unseen monster. How tiny, how puny he was! All at once his fingers encountered the smooth familiar shape of the flash and he raised it cautiously through the darkness. Patiently he shifted the Winchester to his left hand in order to set the flashlight on the top of a flat rock, pointing it as

nearly as he could determine in the direction from whence came those ominous, stealthy sounds.

"Guess I'll switch on the light," he decided, "and trust to drop whatever it is before it reaches me."

Taking a fresh grip on his quivering nerves, Nelson cautiously cocked the .38-55, cuddled the familiar stock to his shoulder. He sighted, then with his right hand pushed down the catch lever of the flashlight.

Instantly a dazzling white beam shot forth to shatter the gloom. The hair on the back of Nelson's hands itched unbearably, while the cold fingers of madness clutched at his brain, for the sight which met his eyes all but bereft him of his wavering sanity. There, belly up, across a low ridge of basalt, lay a hideous reptile, which in form faintly resembled an enormous and fantastic kangaroo. Its scabby belly was of the unhealthy yellow of a grub, a hue which gave way to a leaden gray as the wart-covered skin reached the back. Two enormous hind legs, each thick as a man's torso and each equipped with three dagger-like talons, struck out in helpless fury at the air, while a

long, lizard-like tail threshed powerfully back and forth, scattering ponderous boulders right and left as though they had been marbles. The flashlight being trained as it was, the monster's head and forequarters were invisible, all save two very much smaller and shorter front legs which, like the hinder ones, clawed spasmodically.

"The D. T's!" gasped Nelson, conscious that he was trembling like an aspen. He suppressed a wild desire to laugh. "Yes, I've gone crazy!"

He glanced downwards and leaped swiftly back, for, creeping over the stones towards his fur outer boots, meandered a wide rivulet of bright scarlet blood. From its surface rose small curling feathers of steam which, drifting towards the tunnel's roof, merged with that gray, vaporous current flowing steadily towards the sunless Arctic expanse outside.

It took Nelson a long five minutes to sufficiently recover his equilibrium for action. All he could do was to stare at that grotesque, gargoyle-like creature as it writhed in leisurely and persistent death throes.

"Guess I winged it all right! My God, what a nasty beast! Looks like one of those allosaurs I read about in college. It couldn't be, though—that tribe of dinosaurs died out five million years ago."

Cautiously he scrambled around among the high black stones, casting the search light beams before him and holding the Winchester always ready in his hand while trying to recall snatches of palaeontology studied at college long years ago.

"Yes, it must be a survival of one of the carnivorous dinosaurs," he decided, then paused, increasingly conscious of that steady thudding noise. What caused it?

At last he found himself before the creature's gigantic and repulsive head which lay limp over a blood bathed stone, huge jaws partially open, and serrated rows of wicked, stiletto-sharp teeth gleaming yellowly in the flashlight's rays. The head in shape was bullet-like, ending in a blunt nose as big as a bushel basket and in two prominent nostrils. The green, lidless eyes were still open, shining faintly, and seemed to follow

his movements, but the steaming blood poured with the force of a small hose from between triple row of bayonetlike teeth that curved inward like those of a shark, to splash and bubble freely to the rock floor and to dribble horribly over the warty, gray hide.

Then Nelson discovered an amazing fact. About the great scaly neck, thick as a boy's waist, was fastened a ponderous collar, set with short, sharp spikes.

Nelson gasped. "What in hell!" he cried. "This damn thing's somebody's property!" His mind, staggered at the thought of dealing with a race that could and would domesticate such a hideous monster. "Well, it's no use standing here," he muttered, wiping the sweat from his eyes. "This isn't getting poor Alden away from those devils."

Thud! thud! In the act of turning he paused, listened once more. Then he discovered to his amazement that the heart of the apparently dead reptile was still beating strongly. He could even see the yellow skin of its belly rise and fall. The effect was grotesque, uncanny.

"Of course," muttered the shaken aviator, "I'd forgotten a reptile's ganglions will keep on beating for hours, like that shark we killed off Paumotu. Its heart didn't stop for five hours."

Leaving the slain allosaurus behind, the aviator limped onwards, doggedly following a trail which wound down, ever onwards, into the depths of the earth. Gradually the air became so filled with steam that he stripped off his fur jumper and trousers. Clad in a khaki flannel shirt, serge trousers and shoepacks, he paused long enough to count his cartridges, and found there were just fourteen. Hell! Not very many with which to venture into an unknown abyss. He distributed them in his pockets, and, somewhat relieved of the weight of the fur suit, took up his advance, playing the flashlight ahead of him as he went.

"Poor Alden," he thought. "I wonder if he's still alive?"

Every moment expecting to stumble over the mangled corpse of his friend he hurried on, making better time over the cavern floor, but soon even the lighter

clothing commenced to feel oppressive.

"Must be the earth's heat," he muttered, while the steam clouds rolled by him like ghostly serpents.

"Guess the crust is very thin here—something like Yellowstone. Probably I'll find some thermal springs ahead."

Just as he spoke the tunnel took a sharp turn to the right. He scrambled around the bend to stand petrified, for with the suddenness of lightning a flood of dazzling orange-red light sprang into being.

Momentarily it blinded him, then revealed strange, incomprehensible scenes. It appeared that two short shafts of incandescent flame roared through transparent columns of glass on either side of the passage some fifty yards distant. Subconsciously Nelson realized that these columns began and ended in stonework that was smooth and well joined.

As his eyes became accustomed to the glare he distinguished beside each light pillar two bronze doors, some eight feet high and semicircular in shape. These had been evidently pulled back to expose the

lights. Then his breath stopped in his throat, for there, standing beside them, was a gleaming group of six or eight of the strangest creatures Nelson could ever have imagined. They were men—there was no mistaking that—men of normal size, but they were so helmeted and incased in a curious type of armor that for a moment he believed them gargoyles.

Quite motionless he stood, clutching the cold barrel of the Winchester in a spasmodic grip and staring up at those two watch-towers, built like gigantic swallows' nests into sheer rock wall. He could see the warriors stationed there, peering curiously down at him from the depths of heavy, bronze helmets—helmets which in shape much resembled those of an ancient Grecian hoplite, for the nose guards and cheek pieces descended so low as to completely mask the features of those strange guards. For crests these helmets bore exquisitely wrought bronze dolphins, with brilliant blue eyes of sapphire. But what fascinated Nelson most was the curious armor they wore. Beneath breast plates of polished bronze, these strange warriors wore what seemed to be a kind of chain mail—yet it was not that, for the texture had

more the appearance of some heavy but pliant leather, finished with a metallic surfacing.

Suddenly the spell of mutual amazement was broken, for a tall warrior in a breast plate that glittered with diamonds and seemed altogether more ornate than the rest, clapped a short brass horn to his lips and blew a single piercing note. At once there appeared on the tunnel's floor, not a hundred yards from the startled aviator, a rank of perhaps twenty soldiers, accoutred exactly like those he beheld by the light boxes. They came scrambling over the boulders, their shadows grotesquely preceding them. In their hands were long shafted spears, and on their left arms rectangular shields, charged with a lively dolphin in the act of swimming. Some of them, however, held short hoses in their hands, hoses that sprouted from tight brass coils strapped to their broad shoulders.

Again the commanding figure aloft raised the horn. From the tail of his eye Nelson caught the gleam of metal in the orange glare. While a blast, harsh as the scream of a fire siren, echoed and re-echoed eerily through the passage, there appeared a fresh

detachment. Nelson shrank back in horror, for these bronze-armored warriors led, at the end of a powerful chain, two more of those huge, ferocious allosaurs, exactly like the one he had slain but a short while back.

Like well regulated automatons the hoplite rank opened to permit the passage of those repulsive, eager monsters, then closed up again and halted, spears levelled before them in the precise manner of an ancient Grecian phalanx, while the men with those curious hose-like contrivances ran out to guard the flanks.

"I'm done for now," thought Nelson as he threw off the Winchester's safety catch. "I suppose they'll turn those nightmares loose on me."

He was right. For all the world as though they led war dogs, the keepers in brazen armor advanced, the dull metallic clank of their accoutrement clearly discernible above the sibilant hiss of their hideous charges, which hopped along grotesquely like kangaroos, using their long and powerful tails as a

counterpoise.

Then the officer watching from the left hand swallow's nest shouted a hoarse, unintelligible command, whereupon one of the keepers raised his right hand in a sharp gesture that instantly flattened the incredible monster to earth, exactly like an obedient bird dog.

As in a fantastic dream Nelson watched one of the armored guardians unsnap the hook of the powerful chain by which his allosaurus was secured. Then, whistling sharply, he clapped his hands and pointed straight at the motionless aviator. The creature's green white eyes flickered back and forth, and a chill, colder than the outer Arctic, invaded Nelson's breast as those unearthly eyes came to rest upon him.

Meanwhile the other allosaurus remained crouched, whining impatiently for its keepers to cast it loose.

Fixing burning eyes upon the American, the foremost keeper threw back his head. "Ahre-e-e!" he shouted. Instantly the freed allosaurus arose, balanced its

enormous bulk, then commenced to leap forward at tremendous speed, clearing fifteen or twenty feet with each jump and uttering a curious, whistling scream as it bore down, a terrifying vision of gleaming teeth and talons.

Shaking off the paralysis of despair, Nelson whipped up the Winchester and, as before, sighted squarely between those blazing, gemlike eyes. When the huge monster was but twenty feet away he fired, and the report thundered and banged in the cavern like the crash of a summer storm. In mid-air the ghastly carnivore teemed to stagger. Its tail twitched sharply as in an effort to recover its balance. Then, quite like any normal creature that is shot through the head, it lost all sense of direction and made great convulsive leaps, around and around, clawing madly at the air, bumping into the rock walls and uttering soul-shaking shrieks of agony. Like a gargoyle gone mad it reeled back towards the startled rank of spearmen. As it came, Nelson saw the second allosaurus rear itself backwards and, balanced on its tail, strike out with powerful hind legs as its maddened fellow drew near.

Like razors the great talons ripped through the dying allosaurus' belly, exposing the gray-red intestines as the stricken creature raced by, snapping crazily at the empty air.

A single mighty sweep of the monster's tail crushed five or six of the panic-stricken keepers and guards, strewn like broken and abandoned marionettes among the stones. Hissing and obviously terrified, the second dinosaur watched the dying struggles of its mate; then, obedient to a terrified shout from its keepers, wheeled about to join in a frantic rout of the spearmen, who, casting aside shield, spear and brass coil, fled for dear life in the direction of those invisible passages through which they had appeared.

Chapter 2

No less amazed and alarmed than those vanished soldiers, Nelson remained rooted to the ground, conscious that in the swallow's nest overhead there remained only the officer—a tall, broad shouldered man with golden beard showing from under the cheek pieces of his helmet. Across the body of the still writhing monster their glances met. Nelson could see by the light of those strange pillars of fire that the other's eyes were blue as any Norseman's. Leaning far out over the stone parapet the other stared down upon the aviator from the depths of his jewelled helmet in a strange mixture of curiosity and awe.

Suddenly Nelson's nerves snapped and he shook a trembling fist at the martial figure above.

"Go away!" he shrieked, and reeled back on the edge of collapse. "Go away, you damn phantom! You're driving me crazy—crazy, I tell you!"

The other stiffened, then turned and, uttering a hoarse shout, vanished, leaving the noiseless and

apparently heatless pillar of fire flaring steadily.

Recovering somewhat, Nelson set his teeth, advanced to the nearest corpse, stooped and regarded him who lay there, with bronze helmet fallen off.

"It's a man and not a ghost," he murmured as his finger encountered flesh that was still warm. "Red headed too, or I'm a liar. Now what in hell is all this?"

For all his bewilderment he began to feel better and his swaying reason became steadier. "Bronze, bronze—nothing but bronze," the aviator told himself as he further examined the scattered equipment. "Evidently these fellows don't know the use of iron or steel."

With increased curiosity he bent over another splendidly built dead man who lay with back broken and sightless eyes staring fixedly onto the steam current meandering silently along the cavern's roof. From the fallen man's belt were slung half a dozen curious weapons that looked not unlike potato mashers, except that they were bronze headed and had wooden handles.

"Hum," he commented, "kind of like the grenades the Boche used in the late lamented. Wonder what the devil these are?"

Suddenly his ear detected the sound of a footstep and, on looking swiftly up, he beheld that same yellow bearded officer who had directed the attack. This strange being had taken off his ponderous helmet to carry it in his left hand, while his right was held vertically in the immemorial sign of peace. On he came with powerful martial strides, a brilliant green cloak flapping gently behind him and the jewels in his brazen armor glinting like so many tiny colored eyes. The stranger was indeed handsome, Nelson noticed—and then he received perhaps the greatest shock of the whole chimerical adventure. The gold bearded man halted some twenty feet away, smiled and spoke in a curiously inflected but perfectly recognizable voice.

"Welcome to the Empire of the Atlans. Prithee, Wanderer, what be thy name?"

For a long moment Nelson was entirely too taken

back to make a reply. Desperately his already perplexed brain tried to comprehend. Here was a handsome six-footer, dressed in the arms of an ancient race, speaking English of the seventeenth century!

As at a phantom, he regarded the stalwart, faintly ominous figure, from heavy leather sandals to bronze greaves, thence to wide belt from which dangled more of those curious grenadelike objects. His glance paused on the officer's beautifully wrought bronze cuirasse or breast plate which showed in relief an emerald scaled dolphin and trident. These, Nelson decided, must be the national emblems of this incomprehensible nation.

Then their eyes met, held each other a long moment until the tall officer's features, disfigured by a long red scar across the jaw, broke into a hard smile.

"Hero Giles Hudson begs thy pardon," he said, "but methought thou spoke in the language of Sir Henry Hudson, my ancestor?"

"Sir Henry Hudson!" stammered Nelson incredulously. "The old explorer whose men turned him adrift? So that's why you're talking embalmed English!" In desperation his weary brain strove to understand.

"I know naught," replied the other with a grave smile, "save that the founder of our royal line spoke what he called English. He came from the Ice World to rule wisely over Atlans. He was the greatest Atlantean of history."

"Atlantean?" echoed Nelson, while his mind groped frantically in the recess of his memory. "Atlans, Atlantis!" A great light broke upon him. "The lost Atlantis! Great God!" Had he stumbled upon a remnant of that powerful people whose fabled empire had been drowned ten centuries ago in the cold waves of the Atlantic?

"Aye," the yellow haired warrior continued as though reading his thoughts, "long centuries ago this valley was peopled by those who escaped the great cataclysm which ended the mother country. Later

came another race, barbarian wanderers like thyself." He bowed for all the world like a courtly English gentleman. "But methinks thou art in need of food and sustenance?"

"You bet I'm hungry," was Nelson's emphatic reply. "I'm one short jump of starvation and the D. T.'s. But hold on a minute," he cried. "I'm looking for a friend of mine. He went by here, didn't he?"

"Aye." A crafty expression Nelson did not like crept into Hero Giles Hudson's face as he solemnly inclined his head.

"For the nonce, fair sir, thy companion is hale and sound. I beg your patience."

With a quick gesture the Atlantean raised his dolphin-shaped horn and blew three short blasts while Nelson, in sudden alarm, cocked his rifle and brought it in line with the other's chest. The glittering officer saw the motion, but made no effort to move from the line of sights.

"Thy gesture avails naught," said he with stiff courtesy. "When Hero Giles gives his word, it stands good though Heliopolis and the Empire of the Atlans fall."

One by one half a dozen spearmen appeared, all obviously very frightened and only moved by an apparently Spartan discipline. Promptly they saluted, whereupon the Hero—as his title appeared to be—uttered a number of brief commands in some guttural language entirely unintelligible to the dazed aviator.

Presently a strange column appeared, composed of some fifteen or twenty disarmed men marching between a double rank of heavily equipped hoplites. As they drew near, they clasped imploring hands and evidently begged for mercy from the stern, tight jawed figure at Nelson's side. Contemptuous and unhearing the prisoners' piteous pleadings and lamentations, Hero Giles scowled upon them and deliberately turned his back.

"What are they?" inquired Nelson, vaguely alarmed.
"Enemies?"

"Yes." There was a certain bitter savagery in the speaker's voice. "These are the dauntless defenders of Atlans who ran at the report of thy weapon. Presently they die."

It was useless to interfere. The horrified aviator knew it and watched with compassionate eyes while the condemned soldiers were ranged in a single, white faced line. They remained silent now, seeming to have found courage now that hope was dead.

Upon brief command from a subaltern, the guards wheeled about and retreated perhaps twenty yards down the passage. There they halted, glittering eyes peering through the slots in their helmets to fix themselves upon the rigid prisoners who stood numbly resigned to death.

With surprising speed each member of that weird firing squad detached a brazen grenade from his belt, then threw back his arm in exactly the same attitude as a bomb-throwing doughboy. Then there came a short, sharp command and some fifteen or twenty grenades bobbed through the air to crash on the

stones at the feet of the victims.

His head swimming with repulsion at the slaughter, Nelson beheld a curious sight. It seemed that from the broken grenades appeared a yellowish green vapor which sprung *of its own accord* upon the silent upright rank! In an instant it settled like falling snow upon the doomed soldiers. For a breathless fraction of a second they stood, eyes wide with horror, then collapsed, kicking and struggling as men do under the influence of gas.

"Horrible!" gasped Nelson. "What was in the bombs?"

"A vapor," explained Hero Giles shortly. "A fungus vapor which, falling upon exposed flesh, instantly invades the blood and multiplies by millions. See—" He pointed to the nearest dead man and Nelson, with starting eyes, watched a yellowish growth commencing to sprout from the dead man's nostrils. Swiftly the poisonous mould threw out tiny branches, spreading with astounding rapidity over the skin until, in less than a minute after the grenades had exploded, the whole tumbled heap of dead were

covered with a horrible yellow green fungus growth.

"Thou seest?" Hero Giles demanded. "Powerful, is it not? It is against the fungus vapor we wear this body armor made from the skin of a small lizard which inhabits our mountains."

Shocked and appalled, Nelson watched the retreat of the solemn, silent execution party.

Other soldiers fell to unconcernedly stripping their fallen comrades of equipment; then, to Nelson's horrified surprise, two hideous allosauri reappeared, shepherded by some six or eight keepers. Once the horrible creatures were released, they pounced upon the dead and, snarling horribly, commenced to rend and devour the corpses.

Too shaken to comment or to make the protest he knew to be futile, Nelson followed the stalwart English-speaking officer into a bronze door set in the cavern wall and up a short flight of stairs into what appeared to be a guard room, where food and wine were immediately set before the famished aviator.

"Yea," Hero Giles was saying as he set down a beautiful goblet and wiped the last traces of wine from his beard, "we will soon o'ertake thy friend. He was but little hurt, and thou wilt assuredly join him in judgment before our great Emperor, Altorius XXII, at Heliopolis, our capital."

"Heliopolis?" mumbled Nelson, his mouth full of delicious stew that seemed to be made of veal.

"Heliopolis? How far away is it?"

"A hundred leagues more or less," the other smiled.

"Almost a third of the distance up this great valley."

"One hundred leagues! Three hundred miles! Then we won't be there for several days."

The Hero's deep, rather ominous laughter rang out in the little rock hewn chamber. "Days?" he jeered.

"Days? Art thou mad? In two hours from the time we board the tube-road thou shalt learn thy fate from his Serene Highness."

"What!" Nelson's sunken and blood-shot gray eyes

widened, while his jaw dropped incredulously. "One hundred leagues in two hours? As I remember there are about three miles to a league, so a hundred leagues in two hours means one hundred and fifty miles an hour! Why, that's utterly impossible! The Twentieth Century Limited doesn't go half so fast."

Several enormous emeralds set into the other's bronze cuirasse glittered softly and the Hero's cold blue eyes hardened as his hand sought the grenade belt.

"Impossible? Dost doubt my words, sirrah?" With an effort he controlled himself. "Nay, thou shalt see for thyself ere long. The tube-road runs from Heracles to Heliopolis. Thou canst trace its course on this map here on the wall."

"The dog-born devils of Jarmuth have no such means of travel," continued the Atlantean, with a touch of smug pride that reminded Nelson of a small town Middle Westerner speaking of the "rightest, tightest little town west of the Mississippi."

Nelson found it extremely weird to be sitting there in a heavy arm chair, drinking good red wine with a fierce armor-clad warrior who wore sandals, sword and a war cloak such as might have graced the limbs of Alexander of Macedon. But with the food and rich warm wine, he felt blood, strength and self-confidence pouring back into his weary body. "Jarmuth?" he inquired. "What is Jarmuth?"

At his question the domineering, predatory face across the table darkened and the scar on his cheek flamed red as a scowl of hatred gripped Hero Giles' visage.

"Jarmuth!" snarled the Hero, and his great hand closed like a vise. "Jarmuth! A nation of treacherous, gold-adoring cannibals, whose countless hordes, spawned in the hot lowlands, ever threaten our frontiers. I tell thee, Friend Nelson, the dog-sired Jereboam will not rest until mighty Heliopolis lies in a heap of smoking ashes."

"Evidently," thought Nelson, taken aback at the other's vehemence, "this lad's English only in speech."

I guess he's all Atlantean outside of that."

Warming to a fiercer pitch, the other fixed his guest with a smoldering gaze. "Jarmuth lies beyond Apidanus, the boiling river, and is the home of a savage horde whose horrid rites in Jezreel, the capital, stink as an offense to Saturn and the High Gods! Why, mark you," the warrior prince continued, interrupting his tirade to gulp a goblet of wine, "five years ago, by treachery, they seized the beauteous Altara, sister of our gracious Emperor, and upon the annual feast of Beelzebub, that vile demon they worship, the dark dogs would have sacrificed and devoured her, according to their rites, had not our Emperor dispatched a ransom of six fair maidens to take her place.

"Every year since then Jereboam has exacted that same tribute. Every year their princes and priests gorge themselves on the tender white flesh of our fairest and noblest maidens. But this tribute must end! The augurs have told us so. Help will come from the Ice World." Hero Giles brought crashing down on the table a brawny fist, on whose wrist was fixed a

bright, gem-studded bracelet.

Horror-stricken, Nelson nodded.

"It is for this alone," continued the Hero somberly,
"that thy life and that of thy friend have been spared."

"So? I didn't notice," broke in Nelson, "that you particularly went out of your way to preserve my health a while back."

The heavy golden head shook slowly and a grim smile played about those thin cruel lips. "Nay, but I could have had thee slain. Come, as we go to the tube-road I'll show thee how much thou liest in the hollow of this, my hand." He thrust out a broad, powerful palm. "Forget not, fair sir. At any moment I or my Imperial Master may choose to close that hand."

"Perhaps!" stated Nelson, feeling it imperative to keep up his pose of independence. "But it might just happen that your hand would close on a porcupine, and so far from hurting the porcupine it would be your hand that would be hurt."

"Sirrah!" The Atlantean sprang to his feet and one hand shot to the grip of his ponderous, bronze sword; but even more quickly Nelson snatched up his rifle, a thin smile playing on his lips.

"Drop it," he snapped. "Control yourself, or I'll plug you like that allosaur. Be reasonable, can't you? We both want something, and perhaps can help each other gain it."

The taut, menacing figure in armor relaxed and, with a gentle clank of accoutrement, Hero Giles resumed his seat.

"Prithee pardon me," he apologized ungraciously. "I was ever a hot-head and there is much in what thou sayest. We wish to force an end to this annual tribute—if not to regain our beloved Altara. And thou"—his heavy, golden eyebrows shot up—"and thou, what dost thou wish?"

Nelson lowered the menacing barrel. "I want the return of Richard Alden, free passage back to that spot where he was captured and plenty of food and

help should we need it. If I aid you in one, you must promise me in the other."

"Aye," returned the other doubtfully. "But I myself can pledge naught save thy immediate safety. 'Tis for our Imperial Majesty to say whether both thou and thy friend shall live, or whether ye shall feed our war dogs. Come now, we must go to Heliopolis."



Map of Jarmuth and Atlans

Picking up his heavy, bronze helmet the Atlantean prince set it on his yellow head and waited impatiently for Nelson to drain the last of his wine.

Then, with a swirl of his green cloak, he vanished through the rock wall, closely followed by a singularly distracted and alarmed aviator.

Chapter 3

A bright yellow glare steadily increased to mark the end of the tunnel down which the two had progressed; then, with the sharp abruptness of a hand-clap, there resounded a loud challenge in that unintelligible Atlantean language, above which the hiss of steam could be loudly heard.

Instantly the Atlantean prince strode forward, a commanding figure. Momentarily his helmet and the dangling grenadelike bombs were sharply outlined against that unearthly yellow light. He raised his hand and dropped it, palm outward, to his chin in what must have been a salute. The hissing sound of steam then faded into silence.

Followed at a respectful distance by a pair of silent, bronze-helmeted hoplites, Nelson and his guide descended a narrow stair, which broadened at the base. It was a very long staircase composed of perhaps two or three hundred steps which were occasionally interrupted by wide stone terraces. On these level spaces were fixed what appeared to be

enormous field guns of glittering brass. They were similar, yet somehow oddly dissimilar, to the great guns Nelson had seen in France.

"Behold, oh Wanderer," Hero Giles declaimed impressively, "the lands of Atlans and Jarmuth!"

It was a weird landscape that met Nelson's half-unbelieving gaze, a landscape green with that brilliance peculiar to spring meadows, lying beneath the same deep blue sky that overarched the surrounding barren ice fields which hemmed in this astounding valley.

A slight smile played over Hero Giles' thin lips as he watched the amazed aviator.

"The splendor of our country must indeed astound thee," he observed, "having come from the dreary fastness of the outer Ice World. But come; we are now to pass the great retortii guarding the entrance into the valley."

Nelson's eyes turned again to the weapons that so

oddly resembled field guns. He examined them closely, inspecting them narrowly for the differences he knew must exist between them and the artillery that had thundered during the War of the Nations.

The chief difference lay in the mounting of these starkly beautiful weapons. They seemed to be fixed on a movable pivot set into the coal black rock itself. Like modern artillery, these curious pieces of ordnance bore a bronze shield to protect their crews, through which projected the long and very narrow barrels of the guns. Grouped like cannoneers about their piece stood various red-crested Atlantean artillerymen. At a glance Nelson recognized the difference in their equipment from that of the spearmen behind them. These former bore no shields, no swords or bombs, but wore that same kind of leather body-armor which graced the powerful limbs of Hero Giles. Their helmets, too, were different: only the dolphin crest with a tuft of red feathers spouting from it bore any resemblance to those of the infantry, and, moreover, the artillerymen's eyes were shielded by goggles with thick blue lenses.

As the Hero approached, officers among them saluted, then sank on one knee with head humbly bent.

"Rather odd looking guns," commented Nelson. "I'm not much of an artilleryman, but I'm wondering how you take up the recoil?"

The Atlantean's laugh, which always reminded his guest of the purr of a tiger, rang out. "Why, marry, good sir, there is no recoil! These guns do not use that powder which Sir Henry, founder of our line, did speak of. Thou wouldst see one fired?"

His curiosity immeasurably piqued, Nelson nodded, whereupon the Atlantean wheeled about and barked a brief command. With truly Prussian precision, the artillerymen sprang to their posts, some to a series of levers which sprouted from the rock platform without any apparent connection, and some to wheels and gauges of varying size that clustered in bewildering intricacy about the breech of the great brass gun.

"Markest thou that tree yonder, on the ledge of the

valley?" The Atlantean's blunt outstretched finger indicated a towering pine sprouting from among a mass of reddish volcanic rock at the rim of that new world.

"Yes, I see it, but—" Nelson was astounded. A pine tree in the upper Arctic! That alone was sufficient cause for amazement. From a stiff red-plumed gun captain issued a brief series of commands which set the wonderfully drilled crew to silently adjusting their training and elevating mechanism. Click! Clack! Sis-s-s-s!

All up and down the vast staircase other gun crews stood watching. Nelson saw their weird, bluish goggles raised to that platform where, for all the world like a coast defense howitzer, the great cannon swung majestically about on the ponderous, brazen column which seemed to support it. Gradually the muzzle was elevated, then traversed a few feet, to finally come to a halt.

"Jakul, a Hero!" shouted the gun captain, his hand raised to Hero Giles.

"Thou art ready, Friend Nelson?" he inquired in tolerant amusement. "Mark well yon pine tree!

"Storr!"

Nelson saw one of the armored cannoneers bend forward, firmly grasp a short lever with both hands. In anticipation of a terrific report, the aviator pressed finger tips to his ears. There followed not a thundering crash, but a curious, eery, high-pitched scream, rather like that of a fire siren. There was no smoke! Nelson's incredulous eyes sought the muzzle of the gun and detected issuing from it what appeared to be a thin, white rod. This shimmering stream of silver shot straight towards the pine tree, gradually widening and giving off feathery billows of steam. In a fraction of a moment the target was completely veiled from sight in a furious pall of clouds which, to Nelson's great astonishment, did not dissipate nor condense with the speed of ordinary steam.

"Nava!"

With impressive suddenness the screaming sound

faded, leaving a sort of stunned silence on the gun platform. The gunners stalked back to their original stations.

Slowly, reluctantly, the mist enveloping the pine tree cleared away and Nelson felt a chill creeping up his spine. The pine was a good three hundred yards away, yet now it sagged limp to earth, stripped of bark, twigs and needles, only the bright yellow trunk and major branches remaining.

"That tree was a good two feet thick," mused the astounded aviator, "yet the steam gun bent it like a sapling. My God! What would it do to a man?"

"What thinkest thou of our retortii?" The Atlantean's beard glinted like metal as he shook with a grim, silent laughter. "These great retortii can shoot half a league and will blast any living thing in their path. I tell thee, friend Nelson, the discharge of even a small retortii will strip the flesh from a man's bones as a peasant strips the husk from an ear of corn!"

"Fearful, terrible!" was Nelson's awed comment. "Is

there no defence against them?"

"Of course." The Hero's green feather-crested helmet gleamed with a nod. "Was there ever an instrument of war that had not its defence? Yea, we have the blue vapor to shatter steam particles—it is called the blue maxima. Thou wilt presently see some of our troops armed with it."

"But where does this steam come from? How is it generated?" These two were the first of a host of questions which trembled on Nelson's lips.

"The steam," replied the Atlantean, "comes from the earth. We compress it many times, then feed it into our retortii. Without the heat of Mother Earth and our flame suns we would all perish. Steam is our motive power, our defence and our enemy!"

He flung his hand towards the vast valley stretched before them. It was hemmed in on either side by colossal breath-taking mountain ranges, whose caps shone and glittered with an eternal snow.

"Some foothills! They must rise all of 25,000 feet from the valley floor," decided the aviator, "and I should imagine this valley is a good mile below sea level. Yes! That must be it: this nightmare country lies in a huge geographical fault—something like the Dead Sea."

Mile after mile he could see fertile green land stretching away toward some low undulating hills on the horizon. Atlans was very thickly settled—that he recognized at once—for the terrain was divided and sub-divided into a vast checker-board, such as he had seen in France and Germany, while terraces, green with produce, had been laboriously gouged out of the frowning mountain sides.

Then his eye encountered the source of that curious amber light which pervaded the whole valley. A titanic flaming gas vent spouted like a cyclopean torch from the peak of a nearby mountain. Its steady, subdued roar struck Nelson's ear as he turned away his eyes, for the glare was too intense to be long endured. Further down the valley were two more such incandescent vents, shooting their flaming tongues boldly into the sky, warming the air and casting that

rich, amber radiance over all.

"That is Mount Ossa nearest us," the Atlantean's voice came as though from a long distance. Victor Nelson was too staggered, too unspeakably amazed to register the fact of the Hero's proximity. "Below are Pelion and Jilboa, which, with Jabor, the greatest of all the flames, illuminate and warm the valley."

Nelson's eye, trained to be all observant, ranged far and wide, noting the presence of many lacy, frothing geysers which spouted at varying intervals. There were, also, many steaming ponds and waterfalls which sprang in smoky confusion from the rock palisades to either side.

Nearer at hand he could distinguish a number of huge stone structures, evidently forts and public buildings. Strategically placed all about were more of those terrible brass retortii, gleaming dully under the incandescent glare of the flame sun.

"Come," cried Hero Giles with an impatient gesture of his hand, "we must e'en hasten to the tube-road

terminal. Word has long since been sent to Heliopolis of thy arrival."

Downwards into the valley, which grew ever warmer and more fertile, the Atlantean led on, explaining a thousand and one details to the astounded aviator. Presently they approached the nearest of the great stone structures and Nelson received yet another shock. In a courtyard was drilling what would correspond to a troop of cavalry in the outer world. In orderly ranks the troopers wheeled, marched and counter-marched, their brazen armor twinkling and clashing softly as they carried out their evolutions with an amazing precision. But what astonished Nelson was the fact that each of these strange troopers bestrode a lithe, long-limbed variety of dinosaur, a good half smaller than the allosauri he had encountered in the tunnel. These agile creatures ran about on their hind legs with astonishing speed, using a long reptilian tail as a balance.

On the back of each trooper was fastened a compact circular copper tank, from which sprouted a flexible metal hose that ended in what looked like a

ponderous type of pistol.

In distinction to the red of the artillerymen and the blue of the Hoplites, these curious cavalrymen wore brilliant crests of yellow feathers, and from their lance tips fluttered tiny pennons of that same color.

"They must travel at least as fast as a race horse," decided the aviator after studying the swift evolutions of the scaly chargers. To his ears came the curious dry scrape and rattle of their horny claws on the stone pavement of the drill yard.

He would have lingered to see more, for those grotesque, lizard-like chargers interested him immensely, but Hero Giles beckoned imperiously. So, dropping the Winchester to the hollow of his arm, Nelson followed him into the brilliantly gas-lit depths of the great structure.

Everywhere were red bearded, white skinned soldiers, staring at him with the frank curiosity of children. Powerful, magnificently built fellows they were, all in uniforms of different designs.

The walls about him, Nelson noticed, were covered with really beautiful friezes depicting various warlike scenes in that pure beauty of proportion found only in ancient Grecian temples.

On and on through resounding tunnels, past busy markets and barracks, hurried the two travelers. Then the Atlantean halted before a gracefully arched doorway where stood two hoplites, who immediately lowered spears to bar the passage. At a word from Hero Giles, however, they saluted and fell back in position—immovable, grim guardians.

Inside was a short staircase, beautifully wrought of bronze. Up this flashed the Atlantean's mail-clad body; then he came to a halt under the direct rays of a blinding light.

Nelson, on arriving above, discovered that the chamber was lined with jointless brass about ten feet high and circular in shape. "What's this?" he demanded curiously.

"The terminal of the tube-road. In a moment thou

shalt see the great cylinder arrive."

The words were hardly by the Hero's lips when there appeared, noiselessly and amid a great rush of air, a huge metal cylinder that ran upon a sort of truck. It rumbled up to the edge of the platform and from its end a small door was opened.

Hero Giles exchanged a few sentences with an elderly man who appeared to act as control master, then he indicated the glowing doorway of the cylinder.

Firmly clutching his Winchester, Nelson bowed his head and stepped inside, there to discover a luxury he had never anticipated. The interior of the cylinder was brilliantly lit and on both sides were ranged wide divans, strewn with many silken cushions. In a rack nearby were several graceful glass amphora, filled with red and tawny wine.

"The cylinder must be about thirty feet long," the marvelling American told himself, "and about ten feet in diameter. Guess it works on the same principle as the compressed air tubes the department stores use

to send change with."

Gingerly he tested the nearest divan and marvelled at the curious softness of what appeared to be a gigantic tiger skin. Meanwhile Hero Giles entered, his stern features even more serious, but with him was a younger man who resembled him not a little.

"Fair brother," said the Atlantean to his companion, "this is he of whom I spoke. Friend Nelson, this is Hero John, my next youngest brother—he, too, speaks the language of the great Sir Henry Hudson."

The metallic clang of the door being shut brought a sharp qualm to Nelson's heart. "What are they doing?" he demanded quickly.

"The menials bolt the door beyond," explained Hero Giles with amused gravity. "In a moment our cylinder will be placed in the dispatching chamber, where steam pressure will be exerted. We shall then be hurled through this vacuum tube-road to Heliopolis, greatest city of Atlans. In an hour we will be there."

Outside sounded the sudden insistent clangor of a gong, and immediately the hiss of steam grew louder. The car shuddered as the hissing rose to an eery scream, then all at once the cylinder leaped forward, nearly hurling Nelson from his seat. He struggled as best he might to gain his equilibrium, for the eyes of the others were on him.

Then, more smoothly, the great cylinder gathered speed and hurtled on through the darkness of the tube-road towards Heliopolis, where Victor Nelson would read the book of Fate.

Chapter 4

On the arrival platform at Heliopolis reigned a fierce excitement. Nelson noted countless armed and unarmed warriors hurrying to and fro, desperately intent on reaching their various posts, and snarling ill-temperedly as they elbowed their fellows aside. As soon as they appeared, Hero Giles and his brother became the center of an excited press of gorgeously armored officers.

"Hum!" murmured the aviator under his breath.

"Something's happened. Must be a revolution, an earthquake or a Democratic convention in town; these boys seem all steamed up."

Intently he studied the ring of fierce, red bearded faces surrounding his late hosts and gathered that indeed some event of overwhelming importance had taken place. Presently a splendid falcon-eyed old man in a yellow cloak strode up, struggling to control himself. His resemblance to the two Heroes struck Nelson immediately.

"Harken ye," he cried, in that Elizabethan English which appeared to be the hieratic language of the New Atlantis' rulers. "Have ye heard? The dog-conceived sons of Semites have broken the truce! But three measures gone by, a brigade of their mounted podokesons swooped down on this very suburb of Tricca, yea, to the very gates of Heliopolis! The foul man-eating dogs slaughtered royal serfs and burnt two quarters of the suburb to the ground! Moreover, they seized that prisoner"—Nelson's heart gave a great leap at the word—"whom thou sentest from the mountain passes."

"What!" In two swift strides Nelson was before the gray beard, his blood-shot eyes blazing with a strange light. "What did you say about that prisoner?"

The old man, who had obviously not noticed Nelson's presence, was thunderstruck to hear him speak in English until Hero Giles briefly explained his presence.

"Yea!" continued the elder, flinging lamentations furiously over his shoulder, "these swine of the Lost

Tribes captured him and slew his escort. They have retreated towards the Apidanus, slaying, burning and pillaging as they go."

A sickening, deadly fear gripped the weary aviator. This was too much! Bad as it was to have Richard Alden captured by these weird descendants of a long vanished race, it was far worse to have him fall into the hands of their deadly enemies, the Jarmuthians, decadent survivors of Israel's Five Lost Tribes. The possibility of a rescue now seemed hopelessly and crushingly vague and distant. What could he do now?

In dread despair he glanced about, amazed at the prodigious numbers of scowling men who hurried by, obviously intent upon the commencement of a campaign for revenge.

Then Hero Giles turned his scarred, warlike face, now set in granite lines. "Come, Friend Nelson, my uncle Anthony bids me take thee direct to the presence of His Serene Splendor, where he lies encamped at Cierum, by the shores of Lake Copias. There he marshals the army of Atlans for a march through the

hot country on Jezreel. I tell thee, thou hast come in stirring times. From Heraclea, Thebes, Ys and Mayda will come the Phalanxes. Once and forever we will deal the dogs of Jarmuth a final blow."

Victor Nelson never forgot the hours that followed. Issuing at a fast trot from the tube-road terminal, the two Heroes led the way to a vast structure, in which were stabled both the terrific allosauri and the podokesauri, those swift dinosaurs which seemed to serve the Atlanteans as horses. The dreadful hiss and snarl of these monsters resounded in his ears long before the stables came in sight, and that curious musky odor he had noted in the tunnel was sickeningly strong.

Everywhere he read signs of hurried preparations for war. Savage, surly allosauri were led from their stables, one by one, long necks writhing snakelike backwards and forwards. Then their keepers would, after a moment's tussle, secure huge leather muzzles over their gaping jaws, and the huge reptiles would be led waddling along on their hind legs out into a vast courtyard, there to hiss and strike at their

nearest fellows.

"Thinkest thou couldst ride a podoko?" inquired Hero John, an anxious look on his handsome, friendly features. "They are difficult to manage—but swift in flight as the birds themselves!"

"I don't know," replied the aviator, "but I'm damn well going to try. If your Emperor can help me rescue Alden, the sooner we get started, the better."

For all his brave resolutions, his heart sank, as the green kilted keeper led forth three podokesauri. Nelson stared curiously at them as, hopping along, they drew near, to bare needle-sharp teeth at him while, brazen stirrups on either side jangled softly against their rough, scaly hides.

In evident high spirits the beasts snuffed the air and pawed with their tiny front legs excitedly, making their sharp talons glisten like polished steel. A bridle dangled from the mouth of each and a ring set in the thick upper lip served as a further means of control.

At a sharp "*Oya!*" from an old and toothless keeper, the first podoko sank flat to the stone floor like a kneeling camel.

"A sturdy beast," commented Hero Giles, tightening his belt and securing the clasps to the emerald-green war cloak. "Here, Friend Nelson, thou hadst best don a helmet; the podokos on occasion throw back their heads and so might wound thee." So saying, he set foot in stirrup and swung up into a saddle which was built up high in the cantle to correct the sharp downward slope of the reptile's muscular back.

At a signal, Hero Giles' ugly mount rose to its height and shuffled awkwardly sidewise, as the old keeper, his eyes very wide and curious, led forward Nelson's charger.

"Look," said Hero John with a reassuring smile. "The chin strap buckles so—be sure it fits snug, else it will pound on thy head to the podoko's stride. If thou wouldst turn to the left, pull the rein so, to the right so, and if thou wouldst stop, pull strongly on the nose ring; 'tis not so difficult." He laid a friendly hand on

Nelson's flannel clad shoulder. "How wilt thou manage thy curious weapon?" he inquired doubtfully. "Perhaps thou hadst best leave it behind."

There was a grim smile on Nelson's weary and wind burned features. "Not on your life, old son! This Winchester and I stick closer together than the Siamese twins."

Nelson thrust his foot into a heavy stirrup, eased his weight into the high peaked saddle and gripped the pommel, for though an excellent horseman, he had no clue as to what motion would ensue. It was wise he did so, for the podoko reared suddenly, almost flinging his rider from the saddle.

Immediately Hero John mounted, raised his right hand and dealt his podoko a stinging slap on the fore-shoulder. The great reptile hissed in protest, but commenced to walk off with an awkward, hopping step. Nelson's mount followed suit.

Faster and faster ran the podokos, their long and scale-covered necks stretched far out ahead while

their tails lifted correspondingly, much like that of an airplane about to take off.

"Whew! He must be doing all of forty-five," gasped Nelson, while the wind whistled about his ears and snapped madly at the yellow crest of his brazen helmet.

The ride which ensued remained forever fixed in the aviator's memory. Like so many shots from a gun the three podokos darted off out of the stables, past a gate guarded by a battery of retortii, whose red plumed cannoneers sprang to attention as the three strangely assorted riders sped out into the amber, perpetual light of Atlans.

Nelson, on finding his balance, looked about him to receive impressions of immensely tall structures, of pyramids which, like the ziggurats of Sumaria, and Babylon, were surmounted with beautifully proportioned temples.

"Must be at least a million people in this burg of Heliopolis," thought Nelson, easing his Winchester.

Hour after hour they sped along, frequently overtaking detachments of troops. Twice they halted to change mounts, though the podokos seemed quite tireless.

At the end of five hours' furious riding, Nelson beheld a dense white cloud low on the horizon.

"What's that?" he demanded. "Fog?"

"No," Hero John informed him. "Yonder flows the Apidanus, the boiling river. Not far away to the left lies the frontier fortress of Cierum, where is encamped the Emperor, who will sit in judgment upon thee."

Nelson's heart sank. He had been so occupied with his fears for Alden that he had not dwelt upon his own precarious position.

Scarcely half an hour elapsed, if Nelson's wrist watch were running correctly, before he reached the tremendous, swarming camp of Altorius XXII, Emperor of Atlans. Hero Giles proved to be a

powerful talisman, for everywhere officers and men alike saluted respectfully and sank on one knee as he passed.

"Wait here," he snapped, as the podokos sank obediently to the dust. "Brother John, do thou guard Friend Nelson while I seek permission of His Serene Splendor to bring the Wanderer into the Presence."

Almost immediately the elder Atlantean returned, a frown on his scarred, rather brutal visage. "Come," he muttered, "but I fear for thee, Friend Nelson; His Splendor is in a savage mood—this raid hath stirred his ire beyond all bounds."

"Nothing like cheering up a patient before he goes into the operating room," thought Nelson, and quietly threw off the safety on his Winchester. "Six shots," he reflected. "Well, if I go, I reckon I'll take some damn good company along."

The aviator was led down a long passage, at every ten feet of which was posted an enormous scowling guard, whose spears, retortii and armor were painted

a brilliant jade-green. Then a musical, deep-toned gong boomed twice, and Hero Giles halted before an exquisitely wrought door, which, without any apparent propulsion, silently slid back into the massive stone walls, revealing a huge, brilliantly lit circular chamber that was hung with emerald-green hangings. In the center, surrounded by a royal guard of nobles in splendidly jeweled armor, was reared a dais, upon which stood a throne that blazed with the most varied collection of diamonds that Nelson could ever have imagined.

"Down on your face," rasped Hero Giles as, in common with his brother, he knelt and then fell prostrate on the cool black marble floor.

"Damned if I will," murmured Nelson, and remained erect.

Bolt upright, he looked across the interval and found himself staring into the furious eyes of one of the handsomest men he had ever beheld. Gripping his Winchester in a kind of "port arms" position, he stood to attention—by some curious kink of the brain

reverting to his military days. And so the two men, different as day and night, faced each other. Altorius XXII clad in robes of scarlet, and a glittering cuirasse that glowed like the evening sun. His yellow head was truly splendid, reminiscent of that of a young Roman Emperor. The hair, like that of the Hudsonian Heroes, was blond, curly and close cropped. Yes, thought the awed but self-contained American, there was something genuinely imperial about the Emperor's aquiline visage, for a high intelligent forehead and piercing blue eyes dominated a strong mouth, which was marred by a decidedly cruel twist at the corners. On him, also, was set the stamp of Sir Henry Hudson's dauntless race.

"Put him in a business suit and a soft gray hat," mused Nelson, "and you would find a dozen like him in any of London's best clubs."

"Down on thy face, sirrah!" Outraged, the Emperor's voice rang like the peal of a brazen trumpet through the great pillared audience chamber. The nearest guardsmen held themselves ready, hand on sword hilt.

"No." Nelson's shaggy black head went back as he found his tongue at last. "No, Your Majesty. In America we have our own way of showing respect for authority. I'm an American and, with all respect, I'll salute you as one."

So saying, his hand flicked up in a sharp military salute to the visor of that Atlantean helmet which he still wore.

"All damn foolishness," he silently told himself. "I feel like the lead in a ten, twenty, thirty melodrama. But I suppose it's got to be done."

The Emperor's teeth gleamed in a half snarl as he sprang with Jovian wrath to his feet.

"Dog! How darest thou bandy words with us?"

"Have mercy!" hoarsely pleaded Hero John as he lay on the floor. "Have mercy, oh Splendor! He is but an ignorant wanderer from the Ice World."

It appeared that the young Hero was something of a

favorite, for the masterful, thunder-browed Emperor checked himself and, still glowering, settled back on the diamond throne.

"Ye have my permission to enter and approach."

Whereupon, Hero Giles arose and, with many black looks at his guest, strode forward to briefly explain his presence.

Nelson felt Altorius' blazing blue eyes search his face.

"Then he whom the dog-born Jereboam captured was thy friend?"

"Yes," replied Nelson with dignity, "my best friend. Alden and I have traveled and wandered all over the world together."

"Over the world? The Ice World?" Altorius seemed interested, for he leaned forward, muscle corded arms very brown against the frosty brilliance of the stones studding his throne. He flipped back a scarlet cloak and bent a searching look on the straight,

unafraid figure below.

Impatient to reach a decision, Nelson forebore to amplify the Emperor's assumption that the outside world was all ice and snow.

"Yes," he said, "from the land of America. I've spoken with Hero Giles, Your Majesty's Captain-General."

"So, then, no doubt, he has told you of the law of our country?" Altorius' white teeth shown again in the depths of his short, curling beard.

"Perhaps." Nelson was vague, wishing no further amplification.

"The law of Atlans," pronounced the Emperor with a frown, "states that a stranger must prove his worth to the State, else he must be put to death. Thank thou thy gods that thou hast not fallen into the hands of the Lost Tribes, for assuredly thou would perish miserably, as must thy comrade."

"What is the law of Jarmuth?" inquired Nelson, his

mind furiously at work.

"Their law states that the stranger within their gates must perish on the altar of Beelzebub, Jarmuth's blood-hungry demon god." A momentary expression of sadness crept into the Emperor's blue eyes and he beat a square, powerful hand on the arm of his throne. "Aye, blood-hungry! Lack-a-day! But yesterday, six of our fairest maidens crossed the boiling river, never to return."

Nelson was about to speak when from outside came the blast of a trumpet. The assembled Atlanteans started, paused, and remained silent, listening intently.

Hero Giles looked up, a light kindling in his deep-set eyes. "Yon was an Israelite trumpet."

As the words left his lips there came a hurried rapping at the portal, whereupon the guards sprang forward.

"Bid them enter." Altorius seemed strangely tense and

uneasy.

Quietly the door rolled back as before, revealing an Atlantean whose eyes rolled with alarm. He hurried forward and flung himself on the floor at the Emperor's sandaled feet.

"Harken, oh Serene Splendor! Waiting without is an embassy from his Majesty of Jarmuth. They bear words for thine Imperial Highness."

"Now, by Saturn! Here's insolence—at an hour such as this!" With a furious swirl of his scarlet cloak Altorius leaped to his feet, hand on the ivory handle of his sword, which, to Nelson's amusement was not of bronze, but of good, blue-gray steel.

"I'll bet it's old Sir Henry's original pet sticker," he thought.

"Bring on these dogs of Israel," growled Altorius.
"They shall die!"

"Gently, gently, oh Splendor," murmured Hero John.

"Our full force is not yet camped on the Plains of Poseidon."

"Nay! Have the rogues flayed alive!" was the advice of the hot-headed elder brother. He, like the Emperor, was scowling and livid with fury.

Presently there appeared four men, stalwart warriors as totally different in aspect from the Atlanteans as humans might be. The two races were alike only in splendid physical proportions and human figures. They, the Jarmuthians, were black haired and dark skinned, whereas the Atlanteans, with the exception of Sir Henry's progeny, were red headed. Truculently the half naked ambassadors strode over the polished floor, which reflected their rude images. Their hairy chests, arms and legs afforded a sharp contrast to the neat Atlantean nobles, who drew back with expressions of disgust.

"Good God!" gasped Nelson in lively surprise. "A bunch of the boys from Seventh Avenue!"

It was true: each Jarmuthian clearly betrayed his

Hebraic origin in huge, fleshy nose and pendulous lower lip, so characteristic of the Semitic race. They were fierce, shaggy fellows, naked from the waist up save for a kind of jointed body armor, reminiscent of a Roman legionnaire's. Their long abundant blue-black hair was either plaited or flowed uncut over splendidly muscled shoulders. Their beards on the other hand were short and frizzed into tight curls, in the Assyrian manner. On each man's head was set a highly polished, pointed casque of copper, surmounted in each instance by the six-pointed star of Solomon. Otherwise the brutal looking emissaries wore nothing but dirty, food-spotted kilts and rough hide sandals secured by thongs.

With all the insolence and self assurance of conquerors in the presence of slaves the four jet-eyed ambassadors swaggered up to the diamond throne. Then the foremost briefly inclined his head towards Altorius in a grudging salute and began to speak in deep, resonant tones.

From that point Nelson could understand nothing of the conversation as it was carried on in the guttural

and unintelligible language of that lost realm, but, from time to time Hero John found opportunity to translate an occasional phrase.

Darker and darker grew the brows of the gorgeously attired Emperor and his eagle-visaged Captain-General as they listened to the pompous oratory of the foremost Jarmuthian, and in dark fury more than one Atlantean noble half drew his sword when the speaker fell silent at last.

"He said," the younger Atlantean whispered, "that Jereboam is no longer satisfied with six maidens. Beelzebub demands a further offering of six more damsels to be delivered before the third division of time on the morrow. By Saturn! The insolence of these besotted swine passes all tolerance!"

From the Atlantean Emperor's outraged negative gestures, Nelson surmised that Altorius was making an emphatic refusal and even adding some vicious threat. The foremost Jarmuthian slapped huge dirty hands on armored hips and fell to laughing with an insolence that would have provoked a rabbit.

Forgetting dignity and self-control, Altorius, in a single tigerish leap sprang from his throne and knocked the mocker senseless with a powerful blow to the jaw. Then, spurning the fallen Jarmuthian with a sandaled foot, the Atlantean fixed blazing eyes upon the three other ambassadors who, nothing daunted, closed up, muttering savagely in their frizzed black beards, while their hands sought the spot where swords would normally have hung.

"Nice right to the jaw," commented Nelson with a grin. "He's still English enough to use his fists." He turned to Hero John, who stood with an expression of horror on his comely features. "What caused the row?"

"Verily, our plight is grave indeed. That braggart dog threatened to march on Heliopolis in the first division of morning, and,"—Hero John's lips compressed into a hopeless, taut expression—"our reinforcing phalanxes can never arrive in time to defend Cierum at that hour. Should the defense fail, as it must—since they outnumber us three to one for the nonce—it would cost us many thousands of men to stay the blood-

hungry hordes of Jereboam once freed on the great plain."

Like a star shell bursting on a cloudy night came the inception of an idea.

"Here," cried Nelson, "I've an idea! Maybe I can fix a stall until the rest of your boys do a General Phil Sheridan and get here."

Hero John's blue eyes widened uncomprehendingly. "What?" he demanded. "What dost thou propose?"

Nelson's hand crept to his head, for the unaccustomed weight and heat of the helmet made it itch. "You say these bright boys from over the border want to chow six more girls? Am I right?"

"Yea, oh Friend Nelson, they demand the victims tomorrow morn, else they advance."

"All right." Nelson was thinking fast now, a dreadful vision of Richard Alden stretched for sacrifice on the brass altar of Beelzebub ever floating before his

aching eyes. "Tell those Semites that they can have those six girls *if* they can take them away from me."

A puzzled frown creased the younger Hero's brow and he tugged thoughtfully at his scant yellow beard.

"Prithee pardon me, but I do not comprehend."

"All right, get this now! Tell the Jarmuthians that they can send six of their biggest and best scrappers, one for each girl. If they can take any one of those girls away from me, they take them all—taking me as well—and we'll all get the works in Jezreel together. But, on the other hand, if I kill their six champions, then Alden is returned unharmed, the six girls come home and the six other girls come back too—and there'll be no more hostages. I don't think they'll agree to or even consider surrendering Your Princess, Altara. I'm sorry I can't accomplish that, too. But if I can stop this annual tribute, it won't be so bad, will it?"

Rounder and rounder grew the Atlantean's eyes, and he gaped like a school boy in a side show.

"What sayest thou? Thou alone to overcome six of

their best warriors? Nay, but this is folly! Moonshine! What knowest thou of their weapons?"

"Nothing," admitted Nelson, "but I do know Brother Winchester here." He patted the smooth stock. "He's mighty persuasive, properly handled."

"But they are armored! They have the fungus bombs, the light retortii and the javelin!"

"Righto!" agreed Nelson a trifle carelessly, "but you don't know what this old boy can do when he's put to it. Well?"

"By Saturn!" An uncertain ring crept into the Atlantean Prince's voice. "A moment, while I address His Splendor."

"I'm a fool, a damn fool!" thought Nelson. "Still, it's Alden's only chance—unless the Jarmuthians've got some trick I'm not on to, I ought to stand a fighting chance." Meanwhile Emperor and Captain-General drew to one side, listening to Hero John's impassioned oratory. That the idea met with disapproval, Nelson

quietly recognized from the incredulous, even contemptuous, glances Altorius shot at him. Leaving the four sneering Jarmuthians under guard of the nobles, the Emperor came striding impatiently over the inlaid floor.

"What madness is this?" he demanded harshly. "Dost thou realize what would hang upon thy skill? If thou shouldst fail, our annual hostage for the divine Altara would be twelve instead of six of our maidens. Further, the dog-conceived Jereboam would wax unbearably overweening and insolent. Nay, there is too much at hazard! Though outnumbered we will give battle in the morning."

"Yes?" demanded Nelson, in turn impatient. "A fine chance you'd stand! Why, less than half of your army is here at Cerium and Hero John tells me that the enemy have massed their entire forces on the salient of Poseidon. Isn't that so?"

Altorius' handsome brow darkened. "Aye," he admitted, "but our reinforcing corps will come up before the third hour of the third division."

Here Hero Giles broke in and, speaking with the quick, impassioned tones of one whose reactions are violent, pled for confidence in the American. "Nay, fair cousin," he replied, casting a sidewise look at the Jarmuthians standing in muttered colloquy with their leader, who had now gotten to his feet and was angrily dabbing the blood from his chin with the hem of his yellow kiltlike garment. "I saw with mine own eyes what miracles Friend Nelson doth perform with his curious noise-making retortii. If Jereboam falls upon us ere our regiments are marshaled, then, verily, are we doomed. We have no choice but to play for time. Harken to the counsel of Hero John! Methinks this stranger from the Ice World is no braggart. He will fight well. If he loses he dies horribly—that he knows. The thought will strengthen his arms, and if he wins—!"

Then broke in Nelson firmly. "If I win I must have the word of Your Majesty that Alden and I are to be afforded all help and free passage to that place where your soldiers captured my friend. It that understood?"

Altorius' blue eyes shifted and there was a slight

hesitation in his manner. Then, coming to a decision, he whirled and extended his hand.

"Good, 'tis agreed," he said. "On my head be it. Have patience while Hero Giles confers with these outlandish dogs."

It was with intense interest that the anxious aviator watched the ensuing conference. He could see the four Jarmuthians listening, dark eyes restlessly flitting back and forth, and their mouths twisted into contemptuous half snarls. Then, as Nelson's offer was made clear, a look of cunning seemed to creep into the eyes of the leader. He asked for clarification of several points, then, being informed of the details, his thick lips parted in an evil, crafty grin.

Taken aback at the suspiciously ready acquiescence of the enemy, Hero Giles turned about. "They agree," he translated, "that, should Friend Nelson win, they will return to their own land, they will forfeit the annual tribute forever and return the other stranger unharmed. They speak fair, but I fear—" He bit his lips in perplexity. "These dogs, who talk with the

forked tongues of serpents, plan some snare, some cunning trickery."

"Repeat the terms." Altorius seemed gripped with apprehension too. "Let all be clearly understood: at the third division of morning will the wanderer fight six warriors. No more and no less."

This was agreed and reaffirmed. Then, with an insolent, triumphant laugh, the Jarmuthian delegation whirled about and stalked from the room, their dark greaved legs flashing in military unison over the polished floor.

"'Tis done," quoth Hero Giles gloomily. "The encounter will take place on the plain of Gilboa at the third hour of the third division. And may Saturn help us if thy might fails. Friend Nelson! For then surely will the hordes of Jarmuth despoil us and there will come a desolation and a darkness upon the Empire of Atlans."

Chapter 5

It seemed incredibly soon that Victor Nelson found himself striding out from the serrated ranks of the Atlantean army which, drawn up in a rough diamond formation, looked discouragingly small in comparison to that vast sea of helmets twinkling ominously across the plain of Poseidon amid a haze of bright yellow dust which climbed lazily into the breathless heavens. The Jarmuthian army, numbering perhaps sixty or seventy thousand effective troops, lay encamped in a great salient formed by a convolution of the Apidanus and formed the only Jarmuthian tract of the great valley lying south of the boiling river.

Like low-lying snow drifts, the sheen of the enemy tents struck Nelson's eye as he strode over the bright green turf to battle for Richard Alden's life.

"There was something back of those nasty grins of the ambassadors," he reflected. "I wonder what deviltry they're cooking up?"

He glanced at a stalwart Atlantean herald who,

nervous in the extreme, clutched his brazen, dolphin-shaped horn and followed in the American's wake together with a sad little company. Weeping, moaning and dressed in plain black robes marched six really lovely girls—they who would perish on Beelzebub's altar if Nelson failed. Bitter were the looks of the guards as they secured the hands of the victims and many the hopeful look cast at the impassive American when they turned back, leaving the helpless girls to their fate.

The ground where the one-sided duel was to take place was marked off by means of little yellow flags on a level plain perhaps a quarter of a mile long and wide. Arriving on the nearest border Nelson briefly motioned the herald to halt.

"Might as well start shooting at the best range possible, and beat their steam throwers," he decided. "Wish to the devil I'd a few more cartridges. Only thirteen shots between me and Beelzebub's altar in Jezreel, so I'd better not miss. All right, son, toot your horn."

With his thumb he gestured the command, whereupon the Atlantean nodded eagerly and, filling his chest, set horn to lips to blow a long, strident note that rang harshly, boldly out over the great plain.

While the note of the challenge rang out, Nelson's eyes turned back to regard the Atlantean array and detected, far in the rear, a huge pillar of dust which must mark the progress of the Atlantean reinforcements. Would they arrive at Cierum in time? Then his eyes sought that spot where Altorius and his staff sat anxiously on their podokos, watching intently the impending struggle. Very clearly the flash of their armor came to him.

"I guess, like the girls back there, they're kind of nervous and jumpy," thought Nelson. "Well, I don't blame them. I've had quieter moments myself."

Having blown three blasts, the Atlantean herald saluted; then, with disconcerting haste, made his way back to the ranks of his fellows some two hundred yards away.

From the Jarmuthian army came an answering blast. Nelson cast a last look on the Atlantean army, breathlessly awaiting the impending duel. There was the allosauri corps on the far left; he could see the chimeric monsters' long, repulsive necks writhing endlessly back and forth through the air as they squealed and tugged strongly at their restraining chains. On the right were stationed perhaps ten thousand podokesons, their slender, yellow-shafted lances swaying like a sapling forest in the distance. In the center were eleven thousand protection infantry, green-crested and armed with compact tanks of blue-maxima vapor, fungus bombs and swords. Behind them, and corresponding to heavy infantry, were ranged some twenty thousand blue-plumed hoplites, eagerly fingering the brazen hoses of their death dealing portable retortii.

Nelson had no time to further study the array, for he whirled about as from the Atlantean army arose a deep, horrified shout. He stood paralyzed, his jaw slack. For there, waddling slowly forward, came the most fantastic huge creature imaginable.

Unspeakably repellent and horrible, it stood on short

legs thick as mature trees, to tower at least thirty-five feet above the ground at the fore-shoulders! An immense reptilian neck some twenty-five feet long weaved continuously back and forth, while a surprisingly small, bullet-shaped head emitted rumbling grunts.

"Great God!" gasped the horrified aviator, and felt the ground sway under him. "It must be ninety feet long!"

Paralyzed by a dreadful fascination he watched the ungainly, hill-like reptile shuffle ponderously forward and realized that, high on its back, was fixed a small fort, rather like those howdahs or boxes which are fastened to the backs of elephants. Chilled with the nearness of death, Nelson counted six mail-clad warriors in the howdah. Then the true import of the Jarmuthians evil jest struck him with full force.

"Six men, they said. And six men there are—but the treacherous devils mounted them on that walking hill-side! Guess Altorius can kiss his six girls good-by right now. Poor Alden! Well, I did my best—a rotten trick."

At that moment he felt as an ant must feel on beholding the approach of a human. It was terrifying, the inexorable advance of that colossal, fantastic monster. From behind he could hear the infuriated shouts of the Atlantean army. They knew even he could not hope to withstand the murderous onslaught of the beast now entering the duelling space.

On came the diplodocus, its vast warty tail trailing over the ground and raising a heavy column of dust, while its mud smeared sides bore out Hero Giles' statement that here was one of those semi-aquatic titans from the steaming swamps of Jarmuth.

"Hell! Poor Alden's as good as finished now! What a fool I was to think I could save him!"

Obedient to an overwhelming fear, Nelson whirled to flee, then stopped, as, from the depths of his being, a stronger power forbade him to desert his friend to certain death.

"Range two hundred and fifty yards," he estimated, and, whipping up the Winchester, sighted full at the

ponderous creature's slimy snakelike head. When the recoil jarred his shoulder, Nelson dropped the barrel an inch or so to watch. Nothing happened. The great beast was advancing as before, its incredibly long neck weaving steadily back and forth as though to sniff the air.

"Hell!"

Struck by a sudden thought, he snatched a cartridge from his pocket and, with that strength which comes to men in their hour of mortal peril, wrenched out the metal-jacketed bullet, to reinsert it backwards into the brass cartridge case.

Meanwhile the vast brute had drawn nearer, crushing flat a young oak in its path as easily as though it had been a wheat stalk.

"Maybe this dum-dum will do some good," panted Nelson. "If it doesn't, nothing will stop it!"

Again he sighted until, finding those small, orange red eyes in line with his sight, he fired. This time the

gray-brown monster uttered a titantic bellow of rage, halted, and began shaking its clumsy blunt head.

"Hit it, by God!" exulted Nelson, and seized the momentary respite to slip two fresh cartridges into the Winchester's magazine.

But, to his inexpressible dismay, the monster presently resumed its ponderous progress while the Jarmuthians in the howdah uttered taunting yells that reached him faintly, while the sun flares glinted on their brandished swords and lances. One of them plucked a fungus grenade from his belt and flung it with all his might in Nelson's direction. The missile fell to the earth far short of its destination and seemed to break rather than explode, at the same time expelling that deadly, greenish-yellow vapor which, blown away by a strong wind, fortunately came nowhere near the doomed aviator.

"Oh! You will?"

Nelson sighted swiftly at the grenade-thrower and fired, whereupon the Jarmuthian, some hundred and

fifty yards distant, spun crazily about, flung both arms towards the amber-yellow sky and toppled from the howdah, for all the world like a diver in quest of pearls.

From both breathless armies rose a terrific shout. Accustomed as they were to the visible destruction of the retortii, this noisy yet invisible death was appalling.

But Nelson's agonized attention was not on the assembled armies, for nearer came the mountainous diplodocus, its lumbering strides making the howdah sway like a ship in a gale and preventing use of the portable retortii.

Nelson planted both feet, took fresh grip on his waning courage and shot again, this time aiming at a gigantic, black bearded warrior who seemed to be training one of those portable retortii upon him.

Again the Winchester cracked and this time the black bearded man sank from sight back into the howdah, while his companions, uttering vengeful shouts,

tossed more fungus bombs at the lone heroic figure barring their progress towards the six bound and shrieking maidens.

Towering thrice as high as the largest African elephant, the diplodocus was now but seventy-five yards away. He had hit it, that Nelson could tell, for a large shower of blood sprayed from the monster's neck. Then, uttering a despairing curse, he sent a shot smacking squarely into the left shoulder, at the base of that mastlike neck with fervent hope of finding the heart. But the heavy bullet bothered the cyclopean reptile no more than a sting of a mosquito.

On, on it came. In another minute it must stamp out Victor Nelson's life beneath feet as large as hogsheads.

"Damn!"

Nelson snapped the ejector lever, throwing out the spent cartridge.

"No use," he whispered, "can't faze that hill of meat!"

But I might as well kill all of those bloody cannibals I can."

With amazing speed and accuracy he picked off two of the remaining Jarmuthians, whose shining, bronze armor could nowise withstand the wicked impact of modern nickel-jacketed bullets. One of the stricken men for a moment dangled with the last of his strength from one of the chains securing the howdah to the enormous creature's back, then tumbled heavily some forty feet to the earth.

Only two shots more in the magazine—! Nelson suddenly found himself very cool. "Two shots and then —"

He was conscious of that great, snakelike head darting viciously in his direction. A huge, slobbering mouth, studded with teeth a foot long, yawned redly before him like a nightmare incarnate, blotting out consciousness of all else. Then Victor Nelson, fighting to control his strumming nerves, deliberately sighted into a great, orange colored eye, saw the narrow black iris over the Winchester's front sight and knew

the huge warty head was not ten feet away.

He pressed the trigger and never heard the report, but felt the blast of a furnace-hot breath in his face—a breath that stank like the foul reek of burning rubber.

With a detached sense of surprise he saw the eye miraculously and dreadfully disintegrate; then, as the bitter smell of burned cordite stung his nostrils, he sprang violently sidewise to find himself staring up at the howdah, now towering at least forty feet above.

The next few moments were indescribable. Horrible roars and bellows, loud as those of a thousand angered bulls, shattered the air. The diplodocus halted, stunned by pain and the partial loss of eyesight; then, its infinitesimal brain becoming gripped with fear, it plunged and lumbered sidewise, nearly shaking the warriors from the howdah, where they clung for dear life. Nelson was barely able to avoid the sweep of the powerful tail as the diplodocus wheeled about on hind legs, reeled and started blindly back towards the Jarmuthian ranks. Suddenly it stood stock still, shaking with super-elephantine

motions. Then, for all the world like a balky mule, it sank to the earth and cowered there, despite the frantic efforts of the surviving Jarmuthians to stir it to obedience.

By the strong amber light of the sun flare Nelson had a vision of the last two warriors swinging in apelike agility to the ground. They were giants, those two men of Jarmuth, and their conical helmets added additional stature. One of them, shouting an unintelligible taunt, reached for his belt to snatch out a fungus bomb, but Nelson, dropping on one knee, sent a bullet crashing between the Jarmuthian's scowling eyes. Even as he fell, the last of the six champions unwisely ignored his retortii and frantically sprang forward, razor-edged sword upraised.

Nelson frantically worked the ejector lever but only an empty click resulted! His heart sank. "Hell! the magazine's empty!"

He had just time to swing the Winchester about and grasp its barrel as the Jarmuthian, with a loud shout,

sprang in, slashing viciously at Nelson's unprotected neck. Using the clubbed rifle like a baseball bat, the American struck out with the strength of despair. There came a resonant clang as blade and barrel encountered each other. Steel is ever stronger than bronze, so Nelson had the satisfaction of seeing the Jarmuthian's sword blade break squarely in two near the hilt.

Horrified, the black bearded warrior glanced at the empty hilt in his hand but, courageous to the end, sprang in like a tiger to grapple with that small, agile man in khaki and serge.

"You would—eh?" gasped Nelson.

Putting all his strength behind a blow he whirled up the heavy Winchester, struck out and felt the solid walnut stock smash fair and square on the conical helmet. Like an eggshell the bronze helm broke and the six-pointed star above went spinning off into the dust. As a tree sways before it falls beneath a forester's ax, so the dark Jarmuthian giant tottered, while the wide dusty plain of Poseidon echoed with a

rumbling, incredulous shout.

"There," choked Nelson, incredulous to be still alive, "I guess that'll be about all for to-day."

But he was wrong. From the ranks of Jarmuth rose a terrible, ominous cry and at the same time there broke out the sibilant hiss of a thousand retortii. From the Atlantean army came an answering yell and Nelson turned to race back to the shelter of Altorius' body-guard, pausing but to arouse the terrified hostages. Swiftly he cast loose their bonds and pointed to the nearest detachment of Atlanteans. Sobbing with joy the six girls fled for dear life just as the first of the allosauri went racing over the plains. Screaming, all-powerful and uncanny war dogs, they bounded grotesquely high in the air, plunging straight towards the Jarmuthian ranks which greeted them with a searing, billowing blast of their retortii. Though dozens of the terrible creatures fell kicking and writhing beneath the scalding discharge of the retortii, the main body, perhaps forty or fifty in number, sprang like rending fiends into the dense packed masses of Jarmuthian infantry.

Of the ensuing battle, Nelson had but the most confused recollections. The dominating impression was that the fray was awesome, horrible beyond power of description. He recalled feeding the five remaining cartridges into the magazine, then clapping on an Atlantean noble's helmet. With Hero John at his side he joined in an furious headlong charge of the podoko corps.

Like a vast glittering wedge the gallant Atlantean lancers advanced under shelter of the blue maxima vapor which, discharged by the protectons or light infantry, dispelled the scalding steam clouds launched from the Jarmuthian portable retortii.

"Halor vàn!" Hero John shouted the Atlantean war cry. "Halor vàn! Come Friend Nelson, this day shall the treacherous swine of Jarmuth drown in their own blood! Halor vàn!"

Nelson replied nothing. He was too busy drawing a bead on a gorgeously arrayed enemy officer who appeared to be directing the defence.

Faster and faster rushed the podokos, forty, fifty miles an hour, a carnate thunderbolt hurled straight at the enemy center. Under a hot fire of grenades dozens of the lancers fell and once, when a fungus bomb broke near by, Nelson saw half a dozen Atlanteans tumble from their saddles, the hideous yellow growths already sprouting from nostrils, mouth and ears. The turmoil became deafening, indescribable—like the roar of a crowded subway.

The American had a brief glimpse of a mountainous diplodocus assailed by half a dozen hissing, shrieking allosauri who, employing jaws and claws, ripped great, shuddering chunks of flesh from the agonized and unwieldy monster on whose back the frantic Jarmuthians fought with terrible ferocity.

As agile as grasshoppers, those fierce war dogs ripped and worried their prey. One of them clung like a bulldog to the doomed diplodocus' head, though the twenty-foot neck writhed and whirled frantically in effort to shake it loose. Another allosaurus, whining with eagerness, actually clambered up the back of an assailed giant only to fall back under the blast of a

retortii mounted in the howdah. Bathed in live steam, with bones showing through its melting, quivering flesh, the allosaurus collapsed backwards, but another instantly took its place and, gaining its goal with a terrific leap, made a shambles of the howdah, tearing the men in it apart as a lion does an antelope.

Nelson found himself very busy. The charging podokesos were now in the midst of the Jarmuthian heavy infantry, slashing down at a maze of yelling, black-bearded, Semitic faces. Once Nelson was nearly speared, shooting his assailant just as the lance glimmered over his heart. Again he saw the Atlantean hoplites beaten back amid a pestilential fog of fungus gas which stretched them in kicking, loathsome heaps on the dusty plain. The uproar became terrific, indescribable, as the whistling screams of the allosauri and the saurean bellows of the diplodoci rose above the shouts of the soldiery to fill the dust-laden air with a dreadful clamor. The battle now swayed critically; a feather's weight on either side and one army would roll back in red, irretrievable ruin. It was the psychological instant. Nelson sensed it unerringly.

"Look!" shouted Hero John, dashing a rivulet of blood from his eyes, "there fights the dog-begotten Jereboam himself! Halor v`an! Smite, ye soldiers of Atlans! Smite!"

Following the line of the outstretched hand. Nelson caught a glimpse of an enormous, eagle nosed warrior who, clad in gleaming, diamond studded harness, fought like a paladin of old. Powerful as a dark Ares the sable browed Jereboam raged among the dismayed Atlantean hoplites, beating them to earth with terrible ferocity.

It was a long shot, one he might readily have been forgiven in missing but with the speed of thought Victor Nelson sprang from his podoko, dropped on one knee behind a pile of corpses and, uttering a fervent prayer, fired full at Jereboam's black head.

The nearest combatants drew back momentarily at the unfamiliar thunder of the report and fell silent while the groans and shrieks of the wounded rose loud. As a man looking through many thickness of glass, so Nelson saw Jereboam reel on his splendidly

caparisoned podoko, clasp both hands to his forehead and sink to earth.

Hero Giles, somewhere far in the Atlantean van, saw what transpired and capitalized it with the inspiration of a genius.

"Jereboam is dead!" he shouted in ringing tones, and flashed his red stained sword. "Woe to Jarmuth this day! Smite, ye sons of Atlans. Woe to Jarmuth—Jereboam is fallen!"

And smite hard the reinforced Atlanteans did. Filled with a new courage they advanced so determinedly that the disconcerted and dismayed Jarmuthians broke and fled in a disastrous, panic-stricken rout back over the plain of Poseidon towards the boiling river.

The ground was already carpeted with dead and with abandoned equipment, when fresh packs of allosauri were loosed on the fleeing Jarmuthians to wreak havoc indescribable and, ere long, only the triumphant, panting Atlanteans remained on the field.

Chapter 6

There was music and high revelry in the fortress of Cierum that night, and Victor Nelson, embarrassed and flushed with the extravagant adoration of all Atlans, sat by the Emperor Altorius' side waiting, watching for the appearance of a humbled Jarmuthian delegation.

"Never since the world began has there been such a hero in Atlans!" cried Altorius, his face more Roman than ever. "Prithee tarry amongst us, Hero Nelson. Thou shalt be as my brother. A marble palace shalt thou have and twenty wives, each fair as those damsels which thou hast, by thy might, rescued from the profane altar of the fiend, Beelzebub!"

"Thanks," laughed Nelson, and drained a goblet of tawny wine. "I'd be delighted to stay, but the point is —He broke off short, for there came a sudden tramp of feet at the door of the great hall and there, just visible above the green crests of the royal guards, he recognized that pale, drawn face which had haunted him ever since he had returned to find the abandoned

aeroplane.

"Dick!" he shouted. "Dick Alden!"

"Nelson!"

With that same irresistible form which had won a certain November classic for Harvard, Richard Alden bucked and plunged through a double rank of startled guards and came running across the marble floor, his eyes lit with an unspeakable gladness.

"Nelson! Nelson!" he panted. "What in hell are you doing up there?"

"Oh!" replied the aviator with a joyous grin, "just visiting with my friend, the Emperor."

Alden halted, on his handsome features a curious mixture of surprise and delight. "The Emperor?" he stammered. "You sitting beside an Emperor?"

"Would it not seem so?" inquired Altorius with a low laugh.

"It would," chuckled Alden. "Victor Nelson, as I remember, always was a good politician."

"And," thought Nelson, "I'll have to be a damn sight better one to get us out of Atlans without injuring Altorius' feelings. I don't suppose he'll ever be able to realize that all the desirable things in the world don't lie in this valley."

Throngs of brilliantly armored and plumed officers and courtiers, some of them nursing wounds and bandaged heads, came up to hail the mighty wanderer who had subdued the might of Jarmuth.

Flushed and pleased, as is any normal man under well-earned praise, Nelson shook one wiry fist after another, while Alden chatted with the Emperor. Nobles, officers and courtiers all pressed close to fawn upon the new hero—but, far back in the council chamber, a group of dark robed priests were crowded together. Haranguing the priests was a fierce, white bearded old man who seemed to be arguing violently.

"Hum!" thought the American. "That's at least one

outfit that doesn't like the way I part my hair. Wonder what devilment the priests are cooking up?"

He was not long in finding out, for the black robed arch-priest suddenly left his group of underlings to boldly make his way forward, while princes, courtiers and warriors drew respectfully aside and bent their heads.

"Hail! All conquering Emperor!" The stern old man halted squarely before Altorius' gem encrusted throne, while Alden checked some remark to look curiously down upon the hawk-featured arch-priest.

Altorius flushed and the lines about his mouth tightened, from which Nelson guessed that there was more than a little bad blood between the spiritual and temporal heads of the empire.

"What wouldst thou, oh Heracles?"

"I would know why the all powerful Wanderer, of whom thou makest so much, did not rescue Princess Altara?"

The Emperor stiffened. "Her rescue, being impossible of accomplishment, was not nominated in the agreement," he said coldly. "The Wanderer has in full carried out his share—and so shall we. Honored and beloved of Atlans, these great warriors shall abide among us in peace."

Here Nelson thought it wise to dispel any illusions Altorius might entertain about their staying in Atlans. "No, oh Splendor: remember, our agreement was that, should I conquer the Jarmuthian champions, Alden and I were to be allowed to go free."

"Nay, oh Splendor," fiercely broke in the arch-priest, "permit them not to go. I tell thee the Princess Altara *must* be restored to Atlans! Else,"—a distinct note of threat crept into the old man's voice—"—else evil days shall fall upon this empire, and the line of Hudson will wither and fade."

Up sprang Altorius in a towering rage. "Sirrah! Dost dare make threats to thy liege lord?"

Fire flashed from the young Emperor's bright blue

eyes, and under their fierce glare the old man quailed and stepped back with eyes lowered.

"Altorius keeps his word," the Emperor thundered. "The strangers shall go, though all the black-robed kites in the realm say me nay. The word of a Hudsonian prince is as sure as the fire of Pelion. Get thee gone, rash priest!"

A long moment, the two strangely contrasting figures glared at each other, the young, splendid Emperor and the malevolent, withered old man.

"The Gods demand their daughter," cried Heracles in parting, "and woe to him who says them nay!"

With this parting shot, the arch-priest turned and, scarlet faced, stalked from the council room, while Altorius threw back his head and roared with laughter.

"Come, oh ye Heroes, ye princes and captains! Come, let us make festival before these mighty wanderers go their way!"

Roar upon roar of enthusiasm echoed through the marble throne room, and Nelson would have felt wholly at ease had not that little knot of priests remained gathered like ill-omened carrion crows about the door. Muttering among themselves, they were watching him with a curious intentness that aroused deep misgivings in the American's mind, and it was with something like a sigh that he joined the procession forming to proceed to the triumphal feast on which the wealth and luxury of the whole empire of Atlans had been lavished.

Chapter 7

"That's one of the fixed retortiiis I was speaking about," remarked Victor Nelson as he paused to point out a tapering brass tube which was mounted on a platform above the long staircase up which he and Alden were toiling. "It's a big brute: see how small the gunners look beside it? These steam guns are wonderful things."

The younger aviator sighed. "I've had enough of miracles," he said wiping his flushed features and hitching a small pack higher on his leather-clad shoulders. "All I want to do is to lay my weary eyes on the plane again. What with these ghastly allosauri, diplodocuses and other monsters, I'm damn well fed up with this place."

Nelson settled his Winchester rifle more comfortably into the hollow of his arm. "Correct. So am I. But we can't say Altorius didn't do right by our Nell. Good Lord, what a triumph he gave us!" The dark pilot's smile flashed from beneath his neat, close-clipped black mustache. "Wait till Cartier gets a peep at those

diamonds he gave us."

Panting, the two halted by mutual consent. "Ever see so many stairs?" grunted Nelson. "Three more flights and we'll be into the tunnel; ah, there's the opening. I only hope these blighters haven't hurt the plane."

Before resuming the climb Nelson shifted his rifle, idly regarding the armored gunners just above; then suddenly he stiffened his wiry body with a sharp cry. "Look out, Dick! What the devil? Those damn fools ahead are swinging the retortii across our—"

The dark haired aviator's words were drowned out in a deafening, hissing roar that burst from the great retortii's throat, and his heart gave a great convulsive leap at the sight. Was this an accident—or treachery? An accident of course. Somehow he could not bring himself to think that Altorius would break his pledged word. Projected in a shimmering white arm the scalding death vapor shot across the staircase, its hot breath licking the faces of the startled and angry Americans, and quickly forcing them to turn and run downwards to avoid being scalded.

"What the devil are these idiots trying to do?" gasped Nelson, anxiously eyeing the red-crested warriors who, peering down through the blue lenses of their helmets, watched the khaki-clad aviators but made no effort to realign their retortii. "Hero Giles'll skin those fools alive if he hears of this. Guess we'd better wait a minute: they'll soon shut off the steam."

Shielding his face from the steam clouds that obliterated all view of the staircase above, Alden stood watching the billowing steam clouds in silent awe.

"Terrible, aren't they, Vic?" he remarked. "I've never seen those big fellows in action. They make the portable variety look like water pistols."

As the steam barrier showed no signs of abating, an uneasy gleam crept into Nelson's dark eye, and with jaw grimly set, he cocked the Winchester and turned with the intention of lodging a complaint at the next station below; but, to his utter dismay, he beheld bronze armored figures on the next platform now training their long-muzzled steam gun across the

stair. Even as he sprang back, the deadly white vapor hissed forth from the second retortii, completely barring further retreat down the stair. Like an icy flood the chill of impending doom invaded Nelson's soul. This was no accidental discharge, for with the slightest change of direction in the deflection of either retortii, death would descend upon him and his companion.

Swiftly speech became impossible, as the roar of the huge retortii was deafening; the two were lost in the heart of an opaque cloud which completely blotted out the copper-hued Atlantean sky. Hot blood surged into Nelson's head while he became aware of ghostly and stealthy figures advancing through the shimmering billows of vapor. Up, up, they came, like dream men, their eyes weird and unreal. Cursing the treachery of their late host, Nelson and Alden watched dozens upon dozens of hoplites come swarming up the stairs in solid, dully-gleaming ranks. Apparently intent to take them prisoners, the foremost Atlanteans made a rush, giving the American time to fire just twice.

Unable to retreat, the helpless aviators stood to meet the engulfing wave of hoplites. Nelson struck out as hard as he could at those yelling, red-bearded faces, though he knew the effort was hopeless. He was dimly conscious that Alden, not far away, also fought with the vigor of despair.

With a sense of savage satisfaction, the dark haired aviator felt his fist impact solidly into a yelling, sweating face; then something struck his head and, amid a miniature sunburst, his senseless form sank limply on the damp stones of the great staircase.

After an interval, the length of which he did not know, Victor Nelson opened his eyes slowly, for his head throbbed like a savage's war drum. Uttering a stifled groan he shut the lids to still an overpowering sense of nausea which gripped him, but a moment later he made another attempt to discover in what sort of place he found himself. Gradually, his eyes became accustomed to a curious orange-red glare beyond a series of bars. Bars? The idea fixed itself in his benumbed brain; bars meant prison! Yes, those grim blank walls bore out the assumption. He lay on the

damp stone floor of what must be a fairly spacious cell. Beneath his leather aviator's jacket he shuddered. "Jail, eh? What a nice place to wake up in!"

A groan from behind him prompted Nelson to painfully raise his head and look about. He blinked dazedly, meanwhile trying to focus his eyes, then he heaved a faint sigh of relief as his gaze encountered the muscular, well-proportioned figure of Richard Alden, who half sat, half reclined, against one of the grey stone walls, burying a ghastly pale face between trembling hands.

"You hurt?" To speak, Nelson drew a slightly deeper breath and at once became conscious of a horrible, throat-wrenching stench. Dimly, he recalled having once before encountered such an odor; when was it? Oh, yes; during the Great War when he'd stumbled into a dugout tenanted by long unburied corpses. A cold finger stabbed at his brain. Corpses.

"Are you hurt, Dick?" he repeated hoarsely.

The lax figure stirred and Alden's blonde head was raised slowly. "I don't know." His voice came very thickly. "I—I'm still dizzy. What's happened?"

"Damned if I know; but those bright boys have evidently heaved us into a calaboose of some kind!"

Nelson, on peering about, had discovered that one end of the cell was closed only by a series of massive bronze bars; the two other walls were solid masonry; while the fourth was also solid but fitted with a small oval door of bronze.

"Calaboose? The hell you say!" Alden coughed feebly. "My God, but that steam was terrible stuff. I nearly smothered before I got knocked out."

Slowly, the younger aviator looked about, and suddenly his eyes widened in an expression of indescribable horror.

"Look!" Alden's voice had died to a shaken whisper. "My God, Nelson, we're finished! Look at that allosaurus!"

Following the line indicated by the pilot's shaking forefinger, Nelson peered out through the series of great bars while a shudder shook his aching body. Though he had seen these fearful monsters on many occasions, yet it was never from such a position as that in which he now found himself. To his ears came a sibilant hissing like that of a thousand serpents; and, quivering in every nerve, he forced his eyes open once again, to discover that the cell which he and his companion occupied was but one of a series of cells surrounding a huge square in which were imprisoned perhaps twenty or thirty of those horrible, gargoylesque creatures which were the Atlantean dogs of war. Some thirty-four feet in length, the enormous, slate-grey monsters hopped leisurely about, their warty hides and huge luminous eyes betraying their reptilian origin. In shape the allosauri resembled loathsome and titanic kangaroos as they lumbered awkwardly to and fro, picking viciously at what appeared to be fragments of human flesh and bones.

While the two prisoners crouched paralyzed with horror, one of the nightmarish creatures came

hopping over and, pressing a head as big as a steam scoop against the bars, stared in with huge, pale green eyes. A long minute the ghastly creature remained looking in, clearly outlined by the orange glow from outside.

The doomed aviators found something fearfully fascinating about those narrow vertical irises set in pupils the size of dinner plates. Uttering a deep growl, the allosaurus shuffled nearer, and impatiently rubbed its huge, bullet head against the bars; then gripped the ponderous bronze bars with its ridiculously small front legs to shake the whole grille-work with a savagery that dislocated bits of plaster and made the metal reverberate. While Nelson and Alden shrank flat against the far wall, a scarlet tongue at least four feet long flicked the air but a few feet from their bloodless, sweating visages. Becoming irritated at the sturdiness of the barrier, the mountainous reptile tugged harder and hissed, filling the cell with a foul exhalation that stank like the reeks of smoldering rags.

Nelson's wavering consciousness reeled, and a mad,

dreadful fear, like that a dreamer suffers in the grip of nightmare, invaded his being. He felt the hairs rising on the nape of his neck.

But, with a squall of rage, the monster abandoned its futile efforts and leaped away. Feigning indifference, the allosaurus picked up a half-gnawed skull with its tiny forelegs; and, while the prisoners watched, it stuffed the head into a maw twice the size of an elephant's and crunched the gruesome tidbit as easily as a boy would a walnut. Presently it shuffled off to rejoin the hideous herd in the center of the court.

"Nice kind of a jail we've been thrown into. Wish I could understand what's happened." Alden buried his face in his hands. "It kind of looks as though Altorius had a change of heart."

Nelson replied nothing, but sat staring fixedly out into the horrible court.

"Somehow, I don't think Altorius would do such a thing," he said at last. "Let's think back and see if we can't piece this treachery together."

"Wish I had your faith in the Emperor—but I haven't." Alden's handsome face twisted itself into a wry smile.

"Let's see, now," persisted Nelson, fingering a square jaw upon which sprouted a thick growth of reddish bristles. "There was a deputation of priests to see Altorius yesterday. They were clamoring for the return of Altara—the Sacred Virgin—and looked pretty mad when he put them off."

"Maybe this is the private doing of the priests," admitted Alden. "Anyway, we're in one devil of a fix. There's certainly no way out of this calaboose—and those damned brutes out there look hungry."

Nelson frowned, deep in thought. "Wish I could find a reasonable explanation. I really don't think it's Altorius; still, that's what you get for mixing in on the politics of these forgotten kingdoms."

"But," reminded the other, "you had no choice, old lad. Remember, you mixed in to save me."

From across the courtyard rang a loud, penetrating

shriek of fear that made the two aviators spring to their feet and rush to the bars. Peering across the court, they discovered three naked men shrieking and clinging frantically to the bars of an exactly similar cell.

"What's wrong with them?" demanded Alden as the agonized screams rang louder still.

"I don't know," was Alden's breathless reply. "But what's that noise?"

A curious metallic clanking sound filled the poisoned air, and for a moment Nelson remained utterly puzzled. Then, as the noise grew louder, the allosauri commenced to betray a strange restlessness. They ceased basking and feeding, and their hideous heads commenced to dart quickly this way and that.

While the terrific shrieks of the wretches across the court rang to the copper-hued sky, the two Americans remained in doubt; then all at once the chill of death gripped their hearts, as they saw the bars of that cell directly opposite slowly but surely rising! Uttering

heart-rending cries, the doomed prisoners clung frantically to stay the vanishing barrier separating them from those appalling man-eaters. But, disdainful of their pitiful efforts, the bronze bars rose relentlessly with metallic rattlings and janglings from some unseen mechanism.

Rooted to the floor, both Americans watched the distant grille vanish into the upper stone-work and heard the ghastly hissing as the allosauri herd commenced to move forward. Sick and shaken, Nelson beheld one of the doomed men cling in desperation to the bars; he was lifted clear of the floor and borne towards the ceiling, meanwhile venting his terror with such screams as could otherwise have risen only from an inquisitor's torture chamber.

The tragedy was swiftly completed. Half a dozen of the nearest allosauri, taller than any giraffes, suddenly sprang forward, their long, naked tails rising as their gait increased. Snarling horribly, the vast slate-colored beasts plunged into the cell, terminating shrieks of mortal terror. Backs broader

than bus tops squirmed and tugged, then one of the loathsome monsters reappeared carrying in its dripping jaws a mangled, yet struggling victim much as a cat carries a mouse. In a trice the other allosauri came rushing eagerly up, seeking to snatch the prey from the first monster.

Nelson stiffened. "Great God! And that's what'll happen to us!"

Weakened by his head wound, and blind with nausea, he stumbled to the rear of the cell to collapse upon a pile of foul straw, littered with equipment which the superstitious captors must have condemned together with the owners.

Nelson sank upon them, then stiffened, for his outflung hand had encountered a hard, familiar outline. It was a .45 automatic pistol.

A moment's furious search revealed that the captors had missed or not understood the use of the weapon in Alden's leather flying coat.

"God, but we're lucky," Nelson panted. "The Atlanteans never saw this pistol of yours. They're only used to my rifle."

Hope lit Alden's features, then faded. "But what good is a .45 against brutes like those? Might as well have a pop gun!"

"Still we're lucky," grunted Nelson, delighted to find the magazine yet filled. "Can't tell what's ahead. Yes, we're the luckiest—"

He broke off in quick alarm. From overhead had come a premonitory clang! Somewhere a tackle whined and, with a sense of suffocation, both men realised that now the bars of *their* prison were beginning to creep up into a long slit in the stone ceiling!

Cold fingers of fear clutched Nelson's heart as the terrible allosauri, their jaws yet dripping redly, wheeled about at the familiar sound—to stand listening. Up and up crept the ponderous grille, while the allosauri commenced to shuffle forward, fixing on their next victims enormous, unblinking green eyes.

While the whole loathsome cell spun about, Victor Nelson forced stiff fingers to throw off the safety catch as the nearest allosaurus opened its cavernous mouth in anticipation, displaying an array of curved teeth, as long and sharp as bayonets. Standing some fifteen feet high at the shoulder the horrible creature's body was; it all but blotted out the light. The bars rose inexorably. Now they were waist high.... Now above Nelson's head.... In a moment would come the rush.

Richard Alden stood up straight and squared his shoulders. "Good-by, Vic," he said, in clear, unafraid tones. "I don't imagine that .45 will even tickle those ghastly brutes."

Nelson nodded. "All over but the cheering," he replied with that strange, macabre humor which often comes to solace men about to die.

"See you in church." There was an equally gallant lightness to Alden's reply.

The dark haired pilot, with a curious, detached sense

of unreality, stepped into the middle of the room, the automatic in his hand seeming no more potent than a water pistol, for a ponderous, lambent eyed monster was now hopping forward. While minute particles of dust and dirt rained down from the disappearing barrier, the foremost allosaurus opened its enormous jaws, uttered an eery scream and charged straight at the unbarred cell.

Drawing a deep breath, Nelson raised the .45, sighted, and, remembering his former experience, fired at the enormous right eye. As in a dream, he felt the recoil. The monster neither slowed nor swerved in the least, though its great, saucer-like eye disintegrated horribly. Immediately Nelson swiftly sighted at the other eye and fired, just as the allosaurus' shadow filled the threshold.

Crack! A swirl of bitter smoke stung the aviator's staring eyes. He'd hit; he knew it!

Cyclopean moments followed as the blinded monster dashed forward, missed the circular door, and, butting his head against the stone wall to the left, fell

completely stunned, effectively blocking the doorway with its huge body. One enormous hind leg, fully ten feet long, and equipped with three razor-like claws, projected into the cell and lashed aimlessly back and forth, forcing the two prisoners to dodge wildly.

There ensued that indescribable kind of a moment when men go mad. Outside the cell the ravenous herd pounced upon their fallen mate and with hideous grunts and snarls promptly commenced to tear it apart. The shaken prisoners realized that the rending jaws would before long undoubtedly remove the temporary obstacle; but meanwhile the hideous hissing and the fetid stench of the allosauri breath made the cell a mad-house.

Gradually, the gigantic carcass at the door commenced to quiver and roll violently under the ferocious tugs of the eager feasters. A gap of light appeared over the huge haunches, and, all at once, another of those terrible heads slipped over the carcass and into the cell.

Again the .45 thundered, lighting the darkened cell

with a brief orange flame. A noise like the furious trumpeting of a dozen elephants nearly blew Nelson flat as the wounded monster drew back its head, but the respite promised to be short, for the other reptiles only re-doubled their horrid, cannibalistic rending of the carcass. When the barrier was removed there would be a general rush which the shaken aviators could not hope to stay.

Suddenly, Alden uttered a low shout and pointed to the small, oval door which had, up to this point, remained securely bolted and shut. It was swinging gradually open, rimmed with a strong reddish light.

Wide-eyed, and with black hair streaming lank over his forehead, Nelson, in the act of reloading, swung about to meet this new menace. Hell! What point was there in prolonging the pitiful struggle? What was happening?

Slowly, the door swung back, and a rosy glow lit the opening, a glow that became as strong as the gleam of a spotlight. Then, slowly, a glittering, green-crested helmet of highly polished bronze appeared, and,

under it, Hero Giles' familiar features, now distorted by a terrible fear. The blue eyes seemed enormous. "Quickly!" he called. "Quick or ye are lost!"

Unbelieving of the reprieve, both the aviators stared an instant at that martial figure clad in brazen armor liberally studded with enormous diamonds and emeralds, then leaped forward with the speed of desperation, for from behind came a fierce squalling from the allosauri. As he darted towards the door Nelson had a glimpse of the carcass blocking the door commencing to slip sidewise.

Alden was already out and Nelson sped through the door barely in time to escape the razor-sharp talons of the foremost allosaurus as it scrambled into the deserted cell with a resounding bellow of disappointed fury.

Chapter 8

As the door clanged shut, drowning out the allosauri's furious screams, both aviators, shaken to the depths of their beings, could do nothing but stare about them in surprise. Completely surrounding and protecting the exit stood a double rank of hoplites in bronze armor. Like unreal automata, they remained utterly motionless, fixed in the various postures of an ancient Macedonian phalanx, their broad backs gleaming dully in the light of the neon flares. As in a dream, Nelson recognized on top of each spearsman's casque the graceful Atlantean military crest—a metal dolphin from the back of which sprouted a series of bright blue feathers, arranged like a dorsal fin.

"Thank Poseidon, ye still live!" cried Hero Giles, gripping their hands eagerly. "I had fear for ye, oh my friends."

Nelson grinned. "You cut the rescue act pretty fine, but of course we're damned grateful. And now,"—eagerly seizing the Hero's splendidly muscled arm—"in God's name tell us what's happened. Why we

were arrested and—nearly made into allosaurus fodder?"

Hero Giles turned from snapping an order to a subaltern who was peering down a great, shadowy hallway with a distinctly uneasy manner.

"Much," he said. "Scarcely had ye two departed from Heliopolis than the priests, mad with rage over Altara's continued captivity, dared to seize the person of His Splendor and proclaim a regency. Herakles, the arch-priest is—"

From far down the gloomy, vaulted corridor came a faint sound, rather like the distant cheering of a crowd. The hoplites, standing about, turned their helmeted heads and stared uneasily, their brazen armor glowing dully with each movement.

"I'll tell ye more later, but now—"—Hero Giles' voice took on a ringing quality like the clash of steel—"there is work to be done. To rescue ye, oh Hero Nelson, I slew the guards at the lower gate, for this prison lies in the hands of a caitiff rogue, Hero

Edmund, one who clings to the priestly party. We had best be off lest we be trapped and slaughtered like rats in a pit."

Very distinctly to the ears of the aviator now came the dull clash of equipment and the tread of feet.

"Forward! We must hasten to reach the podokos waiting below," cried Hero Giles, settling his ponderous helmet more squarely on his leonine head.

At once the escort of fifteen-odd hoplites commenced to move down the corridor to the left, their hands tightly gripping the butts of their retortii pistols. At their head ran Hero Giles, and by his side Alden and Victor Nelson, who gripped his .45 vowing never again to return to that ghastly cell.

A long ringing cry from the rear brought home the dread realization that the enemy had appeared. Looking back, Nelson could see the far end of the great corridor filled with menacing figures. Then his heart leaped like a deer in a thicket, for *from ahead* sounded the clash of weapons! The rescue party's

retreat was cut off!

Hero Giles acted with the speed of a veteran accustomed to emergencies. "Forward!" he roared, making the bare walls reverberate and rumble with his voice. "*Halor vàn! Ula Storr!*" (Make ready for your retortii.)

As by magic, there appeared before the retreating force a double rank of blue-crested hoplites who debouched from a side passage into the hall and clawed desperately for fungus bombs and retortii. Evidently they had not expected to come upon the invaders so abruptly.

"*Storr!*" Like a brazen trumpet's call, the voice of Hero Giles rang out the order to fire—which was instantly drowned out in the furious hissing of the retortii of his followers.

Ever watchful, Nelson fired at a gigantic officer who, avoiding the first steam jets, flung back his arms to hurl one of the deadly fungus bombs among the rescuers. Shattering the bronze helmet, the

American's bullet struck the Atlantean squarely between the eyes, but nevertheless the stricken officer's grenade rolled forward and burst among the hindermost of Hero Giles' followers. Instantly, the deadly green mold flung itself upon the nearest hoplites and in a moment they crashed to the smooth granite floor, the yellowish growths already sprouting from nose, mouth and ears.

In the corridor reigned chaos, for Hero Giles' followers were now turning the full fury of their retortii upon the rank of men barring further flight. With dreadful ease, the scalding steam struck dead the opposing warriors, stripping the flesh from their bones as easily as a boy peels a banana.

Amid the swirling white clouds, Nelson had ghastly visions of yellow skulls, of steaming accoutrement, of limp heaps of disintegrating bodies; then silence fell, and, before he quite realized it, he, together with Alden and three hoplites who had survived the disastrous fungus grenade, were bounding along after Hero Giles' glittering figure as he led the way down one passage after another.

Louder than ever rang the fierce cry from the rear. Behind him Nelson could see dozens upon dozens of yelling pursuers, and knew that if he were to live he must run as never before.

Into a succession of spacious rooms dashed the fugitives; on through deserted armories where hundreds of bronze helmets dangled in orderly rows; and across silent barrack halls.

Closer and closer sounded the pursuing feet, spurring the runners to an even more headlong gait.

All at once a door loomed to the right; into this darted Hero Giles and after him pounded the two Americans and three hoplites. In an instant the six men set their shoulder to the ponderous bronze door and swung it to, just as the hiss of a retortii on the other side rose above the mad, blood-hungry clamor of the momentarily baffled rebels. Gasping and sweat-bathed, the fugitives paused only an instant.

"We've gained a short passage," gasped the Atlantean wrenching off his helmet and breast plate. The veins

stood out in great blue cords on his forehead, for the weight of the armor could not have been inconsiderable. "Below wait our podokos."

Nelson stripped off his leather coat, following the example of the hoplites, who swiftly divested themselves of such cumbersome equipment as could readily be removed. Then, while the shouts of the thwarted pursuers swelled like a demonic chorus, and while feathers of steam crept under the great door, Hero Giles spun about and, with his short yellow hair gleaming bright, led on down another series of passages.

All at once the fugitives, now reduced by exhaustion to five, found themselves on a balcony overlooking the great valley of Atlans. Before them opened an enormous staircase and down this they dashed at top speed, infinitely relieved to be once more in the open air.

Running like hunted stags, the fugitives had descended but a third of the great staircase, when, from behind, came a sudden, menacing cry that

warned Nelson that the pursuers had, after going a longer way around, come once more in sight.

"Ah! Poseidon blast the traitorous Edmund and his varlets! See?" panted Hero Giles pointing to a huge arch from beneath which was issuing a glittering column of shouting, swift running warriors at whose head dashed a splendidly-proportioned figure that must be Hero Edmund.

With the speed of the hunted, Hero Giles bounded forward, taking three and four steps at a stride, his jade green cloak snapping out behind. Down, ever downwards over the endless flight of stairs the aviators followed him until, spent and panting, the hard pressed five plunged down a final circular staircase and so gained a courtyard where waited a detachment of armored lancers whose yellow plumes and pennons shone bright in the glare of the flame suns. Staring anxiously upwards, the troopers nevertheless stood to attention in an orderly rank beside those curious Atlantean mounts called podokos.

During all his sojourn in Atlans, Nelson had never become used to the hideous and awe-inspiring podokos which closely resembled the allosauri but were only eighteen feet long. Like the other monsters, they had tremendously developed hind legs which promised the speed now so vital for escape and safety. Ready in the tooth-studded jaws of each podoko was fitted a bronze bit together with a bridle and reins; and cinched up on each creature's back was one of those curious Atlantean saddles, which was built up at the cantle to overcome the downward slope of the podokos' spines.

Need for vital haste was but too obvious and, as he drew near, Hero Giles gasped the command to be off.

"Quick," he shouted, his scarred visage flushed and sweat-bathed. "Saddles! Speed! Speed! Cling fast as your beasts arise!"

All five literally hurled themselves into gorgeously caparisoned saddles. Instantly, the urging squatting podokos leaped to their feet.

It was the work of a moment for Nelson to wrench his reptile around, for already Alden and the Atlantean cavalymen were speeding across the wide paved court, their lance pennons fluttering bravely in the orange-hued glare.

At top speed the rescuers dashed for a great, oval gateway while the podokos increased their gait; like aero-planes gathering speed, the faster the weird creatures traveled, the higher arose their tails.

Then, following the frightened, backward glances of the hard-riding, red-haired lancers, Nelson suddenly discovered a new and terrible cause for this headlong flight, for, issuing from an unbarred gateway, came perhaps a dozen of *the terrible and enormous allosauri*, which, spying the fleeing cavalry, instantly gave chase.

With a sense of despair, the aviators heard the ferocious bellows booming from behind and watched the appallingly swift progress of those uncouth monsters as, leaping high into the air, the allosauri covered between fifty and sixty feet at a single bound.

"They'll get you," cried an inner voice in Nelson's being. "They'll catch you sure." But the small and lithe podokos, sensing death leaping up from the rear, stretched out their slender, snake-like heads, stood on tiptoe, and, pressing their small forelegs tight against their chests, commenced to run far faster than any horse could gallop. Nevertheless, the allosauri came bounding up like colossal kangaroos, uttering weird, screaming roars that brought a chill of imminent death to the fugitives.

Casting a quick glance over his shoulder, Nelson's blood froze to find an allosaurus not more than seventy yards behind, and making terrible exertions to close that slender gap! Nearer and nearer coursed the incredible monster, body rocking in its terrific stride, dreadful jaws wide apart—jaws that could, without an effort, cut a horse in half.

A fear such as he had never known racked Nelson's consciousness as he found he was hindermost of the cavalcade, which was strung out like a field of racers. The other riders crouched low in their saddles like jockeys, lances held straight out before them, and

furiously goaded their strange mounts with curious hooks. Nelson was vastly relieved to get a glimpse of Alden far in the lead, almost beside the Atlantean Prince. His podoko was evidently better than the average.

Faster and faster pursuers and pursued raced across level meadows, over straight, white roads and rolling grain fields. Wind whistled madly in Nelson's ears, filled his eyes with tears, and made his short, dark hair snap, but two huge allosauri were now not twenty yards behind and *gaining with appalling speed!*

On the verge of madness, Nelson hammered his heels into the podoko's scaly side and wished he dared let go the saddle horn to draw his pistol, but to loose his grip was to risk falling off.

Closer and closer! Two enormous nightmarish heads were actually snapping at the fleeing podoko's tail. Then fear must have inspired the reptile Nelson bestrode, for it put on a sudden desperate burst of speed which carried it past the next two lancers. In

passing he glimpsed the doomed wretches, pale-faced and horrified, as they frantically goaded their failing podokos.

A moment later, piercing screams from just behind assailed Nelson's ears, but when he looked to the rear once more it was to find that a wide gap had opened between him and the great monsters behind.

Evidently, the heavy-built allosauri were unable to long maintain the terrific pace set by the smaller and more agile podokos whose maximum speed Nelson judged to be well over sixty miles an hour.

The pilot's eyes narrowed on beholding, in clear relief and not far away, the majestic, whitish outline of mighty Heliopolis, whose lofty towers, graceful domes and frowning citadels shone pink under the leaping, blinding glare on Mount Pelion.

"We certainly picked a nice time to drop in on this God-forsaken country," grunted Alden as the walls of Heliopolis loomed near. "We seem to have crashed into the busiest days they've had in centuries. How many shots you got?"

Nelson, swaying to the steady trot of his podoko, hesitated.

"Only five. Damned if I know what's going to happen next. I suppose it all depends on Hero Giles. Looks as though the nobles were bent on restoring Altorius—if he's not dead by now."

Alden tugged powerfully at the strange bridle which controlled his beast. "The priests wouldn't dare kill him, but it surely looks like their rebellion has gained a lot of headway."

A moment Alden's clear, blue eyes swept the towering battlements, gorgeously-sculptured temples and curious stepped pyramids, which now loomed near at hand and cast their rugged outlines sharp against the copper-colored heavens.

"Maybe there's some way we can work this revolution trouble to help us," suggested Nelson, without enthusiasm. "If we could play off one crowd against the other—"

His remarks were cut short as the foremost lancers slowed before an enormous bronze gate looming ahead. On the vast main panel was a beautifully-wrought dolphin curling about a trident—symbol of the imperial power now so sorely tried. Beyond that gate, breathlessly mused Nelson, lay Heliopolis and an unknown fate.

Chapter 9

It would have taken no trained eye to observe that something very unusual had happened in Atlans. Some of Heliopolis' many wide streets were quite deserted save for several small, bright-red cat-like reptiles that the Atlanteans sheltered as pets, but in other thoroughfares large throngs of people milled uneasily about, while listening to the impassioned harangue of black-robed priests. Everywhere business was at a standstill, shops were closed and markets tenantless.

Riding at an easy hopping gallop, the aviators urged their green, scaly mounts to the side of Hero Giles, for here and there some wandering citizens, spying the Americans, would yell shrill curses and shake their fists. Reining in, Nelson demanded to know the reason for this unaccountable hostility.

"'Tis the work of our gentle and holy priests," explained Hero Giles with a hard laugh. "They have told the populace ye are magicians seeking to set other gods above Poseidon."

"Nonsense," rapped the American, looking about uneasily. "We've never given two thin damns about anything except getting back to our plane."

"So I know," was the Atlantean's preoccupied reply; "but this spawn of Herakles' temples speak loud, and the loutish populace hearkens to their lies!"

"But what the devil is all this revolt about?" broke in Alden. "Why were we arrested? You started to tell us at the prison."

Hero Giles frowned as he pulled his podoko into a gracefully carved gateway of green marble. "There's but little to add, for 'tis all very simple. The priests have laid impious hands on His Splendor, Altorius, and imprisoned him in the great temple of Poseidon. We nobles have defied the arch-priest, for the dog-conceived Jereboam already marshals his forces for a fresh attack, knowing that Atlans is sore beset by internal strife. Have patience for now we go to the council chamber, where ye shall hear everything."

To say that the newcomers found the council of nobles

in a furore would be to put it mildly. Their angry voices carried far down the beautifully ornamented corridors of the Imperial Palace, which was used as headquarters.

"Sounds like a dog-fight going on in there," muttered Alden anxiously. "Don't like the sound of it a bit. I hope they feel kindly towards us."

Nelson, swinging along with his ragged shirt fluttering like a scarecrow's, nodded. "Yes, so do I. But I guess they need our help or Hero Giles wouldn't have risked his life to save us."

Conscious of the value of appearances, the dark-haired aviator unconsciously straightened his frayed black tie, buttoned the sleeves of his khaki flannel shirt and otherwise made pathetic attempts at improving his appearance as the clamor of wrangling voices grew loud down the corridor.

His wide shoulders swinging to his stride, Hero Giles flung open a door, beautifully wrought with leaping podokos, and halted on the threshold.

"Death!" rumbled a voice from inside. "I say death to the Wanderers! Let us make our peace with the priests, lest they slay His Splendor forthwith."

"And that's what I call a nice friendly greeting," was Alden's murmured comment. "Better get your gat handy, Vic. I'll bet they've got a reception committee of retortii men behind the door."

There was no time for Nelson to reply because now the threshold was at hand. Inside, seated at a table, he had an impression of perhaps ten or fifteen scarred and angry-looking veteran nobles whose green cloaks and bejeweled armor revealed their high rank.

In mid-dispute they halted, eyeing the three figures in the doorway with curiously conflicting expressions. Some smiled a relieved welcome, some stared in surprise, but not a few greeted the Americans with lowering brows and angry, threatening eyes.

"Harken," Hero Giles greeted them. "By Poseidon's grace the Wanderers were saved from a vile death.

Rise Heroes, and bid them welcome!"

"Ah, the Wanderers!" In an instant Hero John was wringing Nelson's hand. "Oh blessed hour! I had feared for ye both. Welcome, Hero Alden!"

A faint flush crept over the young man's wan and trouble-lined face. "'Tis well ye've come," he whispered. "The council was prepared to change their intent towards ye."

A grizzled, one-eyed prince arose, and leveling an accusing forefinger at Nelson shouted, "'Tis he hath caused the rebellion. Slay him!"

"Nay!" thundered the Hero Giles, "and forget not, Hero Paul—I am senior Prince of Atlans!"

In the great white marble council chamber silence fell, while from wonderfully carved ivory and gold chairs the harassed, yellow-bearded princes regarded the two uneasy Americans.

"Hearken, Hero Giles!" rasped another dark-browed

officer in a plain, much-dented red breast plate. "I side with Paul. Away with them, I say! Time is too precious. Do not the dark hordes of Jereboam beat back our frontiers?"

Hero Giles glowered and sat bolt upright in his chair—a strange disordered figure among his gorgeously robed and armored peers. "Thou wert ever a hothead! I prithee pause a moment! Remember how the dark-haired Wanderer once aided our imprisoned Emperor, whom Poseidon protect! Perchance, Hero Nelson and his friend once more can aid us in this, our hour of need."

A chorus of variously opined voices broke out, while Nelson with an eye to possible violence stood ready.

"Silence! Sirrah!" The fierce old veteran banged a powerful fist on a golden dolphin head forming his chair arm. "This idle wrangling accomplishes naught, and a thousand weighty matters await our attention. Is it true the phalanxes at Tricca have risen for the priests?"

Before Hero Giles could reply, a stalwart guard at the door flung it open to admit a dust and sweat-bathed courier who, darting forward, flung himself at Hero Giles' no less dusty feet. While the yellow-haired Prince started back muttering in amazement, the runner raised a shaking hand.

"Woe, woe to Atlans!" he panted. "Jarmuthian retortii men have crossed the boiling river. Cierum is fallen! Its garrison is drenched in clouds of fungus gas. But a handful escaped!"

"Speak on: is that all?" A terribly intent expression crept over the aquiline faces around the council table.

"Nay, spare thy servant!" begged the green kilted courier, raising sweaty, imploring hands. "I—I dare not—"

"Speak!" snarled Hero Giles, his blue eyes terribly lit. "Speak!—else thy carcass shall be flung to the pteranodons."

Wild-eyed, the fellow blinked fearfully about. The

grim-lipped nobles edged closer. Nelson, realizing all that lay at stake, watched intently, conscious that Alden was now by his side.

"I—I, Her Sacred Holiness, Altara—." The messenger's red face twitched and he choked as in terror.

"Altara!" The name reechoed weirdly from a dozen dry throats, and Nelson saw the skin suddenly pale and tighten over Hero John's face.

"What of the divine Altara, fool?" he thundered in a dreadful, shaken monotone. "Have those foul swine of Jarmuth dared—?"

"Forgive, oh Hero!" cried the groveling courier, his long red hair sweeping the marble floor. "The dog-sired Jereboam hath made proclamation in Jezreel that the Sacred Virgin is doomed to perish on the altar of Beelzebub, their demon god, in two days' time!"

"What?" The great marble-walled chamber was

shaken by an unearthly outcry as horror and rage struggled for mastery in the circle of tense faces surrounding the momentarily forgotten aviators.

Bedlam broke loose, while Hero Giles sat as though stunned, staring on the shivering runner at his feet.

Nelson, very much on the alert, could see that the announcement of Altara's impending death had produced nothing short of a cataclysm in the plans of the council.

Like men paralyzed by electric shocks, the yellow bearded veterans and nobles sat stupefied, frozen in their last gesture. Then, in the midst of their silent despair, came the sound of a curious, high-pitched horn that had in its note something of the eery wail of a fire siren. The effect was magical, for the nobles sprang up, hands on sword hilts and eyes searching the corridor.

"The priests!" gasped a short, broad-shouldered noble at Altorius' left. "By Poseidon! 'Tis the fanfare of the Herakles himself."

Then indeed did the council glower, for, as Nelson soon learned, Herakles was the moving spirit and evil genius of that priestly party which had dared to imprison the Emperor.

Again the horn wailed its warning of the arch-priest's approach, whereat a stalwart hoplite in green painted armor clanked in, saluted stiffly and waited for Hero Giles' instructions.

"Bid the old man enter," directed the Prince at last. "Tell the graybeard he has naught to fear if he comes alone. Otherwise, bid him return to his kennel in the temples."

A moment after the hoplite had vanished, there appeared in the doorway a tall, emaciated old man on whose silvery head was set a curious golden mitre ending in the shape of a wondrously bejewelled trident. The curious Americans noted that the arch-priest's robes were as black as his evilly glittering eyes, and were embroidered with curious cabalistic symbols done in silver thread. In his withered hand Herakles carried a ceremonial trident—the mark of

the Head Priest of Poseidon.

As though wary of advancing, the arch priest paused in the doorway, not three feet from where Nelson stood poised for action.

All at once the gaunt figure in black raised thin hands to the dome far overhead and cried in high-pitched prophetic tones:

"Woe to Atlans! When perishes Altara, virgin of Poseidon the God-head, then shall a darkness fall on Atlans! Her cities shall be cast down, there will be a weeping and wailing in the land, for Beelzebub and his followers shall prevail! Woe to Atlans and woe to ye all, blasphemous nobles!"

Gripped by a superstitious awe, the generals and nobles fell into an uneasy silence, fearfully lowering their eyes and then glancing askance at the plain khaki clad figures standing alert in their corner.

Nelson, defiantly meeting their eyes, beheld Hero Giles staring fixedly before him, his powerful

shoulders bowed as though bearing an overwhelming burden.

Deeper grew the silence of disaster while the American furiously searched his mind for some means of thwarting the death in store for him and his companion. By chance, a word of Hero Giles recurred, the "pteranodons." What in the devil was a pteranodon? He turned sidewise to Alden who stood, hands in the pocket of his leather jacket, also thinking deeply.

"Dick," he whispered. "You studied paleontology at college. Do you remember what a pteranodon was?"

"A what?" The younger aviator seemed to make a definite effort to return to the present. "A pteranodon? I'm not sure, Vic, but I think it was a kind of flying reptile related to the pterodactyl group."

He could go on no further, for Herakles, the arch-priest, raised his snowy head suddenly, his eyes blazing. "To save Atlans in her hour of trial, we

demand that ye deliver to us the Wanderers. They shall die as an offering to Ares, God of War. Perchance he will preserve us." The arch-priest's deep-set and glittering eyes swept with venomous hatred the two calm-featured aviators, who looked very plain and unromantic in their flying jackets and khaki serge. "We, familiars of the Gods, herewith demand that the blasphemers perish on the War God's altar! Else shall ye all die unbeloved of the Gods!"

"And we do your bidding, will ye give us back His Splendor?" demanded Hero Giles.

"Nay—we priests do not bargain like hucksters."

Risking all, Nelson muttered a swift aside to Alden. "How big were those pteranodons?"

"Some species had a wing spread of twenty-five feet."

The muscular pilot's mouth closed into a firm, colorless line as he nodded and glanced at the vindictive old man who was by now white with fury.

Up sprang a good three-quarters of the nobles present and turned on the grim figure at the head of the board.

"Surrender the Wanderers!" they shouted. "We demand it!"

In another instant the death sentence would have been forced on Hero Giles, but Victor Nelson leaped forward, pistol menacing the raging gray-bearded priest.

"Listen, all of you!" he shouted in deep tones that were strangely authoritative. "Beware, foolish Princes, how you threaten us. Great is our knowledge and power: you've seen that already. Even now, the other Wanderer and I can save or ruin Atlans, as we wish! Have ye forgotten the battle by Lake Copias?"

The Princes, furious at the American's defiance, half rose, hand on sword hilt, but sank back at a swift, menacing gesture from Nelson's pistol.

"What sayest thou, mad fellow?" screeched the arch-

priest, his black eyes bright as knife points. "Save Atlans—?" Fierce questioning was in his sombre, sunken eyes.

"I said," repeated Nelson, "that, if we choose, we can yet save your Altara and the Emperor from death."

"Impossible! He is mad!" shouted Paul, the one-eyed Hero. "Not the Gods themselves could rescue Altara from the claws of the demon Beelzebub!" The nearest nobles flung themselves back in their chairs and snarled threats of all kinds as they gripped their sword hilts.

Sensing an inescapable climax, the khaki-clad American raised his pistol, covering Hero Paul, the speaker. "Silence!" he rasped. "You're a thick-headed idiot not to see the truth. Can this priest save Altara? No! You know damned well he can't! And yet you'd have us killed."

"Now, Herakles," he swung on the priest, "about this Altara matter—if you'll restore Altorius unharmed, guarantee our safety, and punish those liars who

condemned us to death, the other Wanderer and I will undertake to not only prevent the sacrifice of Altara, but to bring the Princess back as well!"

To all this Alden listened with increasing and indescribable dismay, his blue eyes round as marbles. "My God!" he whispered in an undertone. "What in the devil is Vic doing? *Undertake* is *right*, the crazy fool!"

"How will ye accomplish this mad boast?" demanded the arch-priest in deep suspicion. "Know ye that the Sacred Virgin lies captive in the dungeons of the great temple of Beelzebub? Know ye that this temple is in the center of Jezreel, capitol of Jarmuth?"

"I had some idea that was the case."

"Know ye," continued, the graybeard priest, "that Altara is ever guarded by two thousand picked priests and warriors? Know ye, moreover, that this vile sacrifice will be made but two days hence?"

The aviator's lean, dark head inclined with a serenity

he far from felt.

At this point the scarred veteran officer who had spoken before broke in, his face menacing. "Believe not this liar, oh Hero Giles! He speaks with a tongue made bold by fear. He promises that which he cannot accomplish!"

Had Victor Nelson had time to reflect upon the weirdness of the plan he had evolved, he would probably have silently admitted that his grizzled accuser was more than a little justified, but as it was he smiled serenely.

From all sides rose a threatening shout. "Let the blasphemers be sacrificed. Ares will protect us!"

His yellow brows knit, Hero Giles wavered, but as he hesitated there ran through a great circular window a distant yet menacing shout. "Down with Altorius, the Unlucky! Down with the sons of Hudson! Give back to the ancient Gods their Sacred Virgin. Hail to Ares!"

Death to the Wanderers! Death! Death!"

Drowning out these ominous cries there came from below the window the brazen clang of trumpets and the clank of many armored men hurrying forward. Presently the mob's outcry grew fainter, but still the cries of "Death" could be heard.

It was a tense moment. Would Hero Giles remain friendly? With poignant anxiety, Nelson watched that dishevelled martial head sink forward in perplexity.

"Hero Giles," he warned, in a low voice. "You'd better trust us. You're risking nothing."

Slowly, the fierce blue eyes of the veteran rose, and, meeting the level gray ones of the aviator, lingered there as though asking a question. Suddenly reaching a determination, he rose to his feet and addressed the triumphantly grinning arch-priest, who tightly clutched his trident wand with thin, blue-veined fingers.

"Hearken, black crow of a priest, who has dared lay

foul hands on His Splendor, the Emperor. This is my reply: show me how ye will rescue Altara; otherwise begone! My hand itches for the sword."

A deep silence fell while Herakles glowered helplessly, then shrewdly avoided the trap. "This is blasphemy!" he croaked and raised a quivering forefinger in solemn warning. "Woe to thee, Hero Giles. Woe to the people! Fear the wrath of the Gods!

"Jeer not, ye nobles!" Herakles stormed on. "Be not deceived by lies! I bid thee deliver these magicians to Ares, God of War!"

A nasty moment; Nelson's heart drummed as he gazed down at the row of uneasy, war-like faces, but Hero Giles proved the strength of his heritage. Back went his patrician head; he drew himself up to full height and stared coldly upon the black robed priest, who, nothing daunted, gave back look for look.

"Nay! We keep them: they will bear out their promise. I give ye good day, oh Holiness!"

Quivering with rage Herakles raised his withered hand in anathema. "Then perish, blind spawn of Hudson! Verily shall ye all die under the torture. Woe! Woe! Woe!"

Then, amid a strained silence, pregnant of distrust and disaster, the old man wheeled and stalked out.

As he watched the departure, color drained from the Atlantean prince's haggard features. "Ah," he observed bitterly, "ever have these black crows feasted on our land, and ever as birds of ill omen." He turned and, with a weary sigh, surveyed the group of loyal, but anxious souls. "I thank ye. Will ye still do my bidding and help to save our sovereign lord?"

Out flashed the swords of a dozen-odd nobles as they raised the hoarse, ringing cry of "Altorius! Altorius! Supreme!"

A little later Nelson, before a very mistrustful gathering composed of Hero Giles, Hero John and two or three other veterans, traced the barest outline of his plan.

"You understand? I'm to be taken to the border as a prisoner; then, in plain sight of the enemy lines, the guards must maltreat me and turn me loose."

The aviator searched one after another of the brutal, war-like faces, while Hero Giles translated for the benefit of two Atlantean generals who did not speak the royal language.

"Are you positive," Alden demanded of Hero John, "that this revolution in Atlans will die out if Altara is returned?"

"Yes! A thousand times yes!" The prince's fine eyes gleamed with savage enthusiasm. "With the Sacred Virgin restored to Atlans, new courage will come into the phalanxes! The priests will cease their outcries against them. Then, with the help of the blue maxima vapor, we will rend the dog-begotten followers of Jereboam limb from limb!"

"All right." Nelson's wiry khaki-clad body bent far over the table. "Remember, Hero Giles, that part of the fighting's up to you. When I'm gone, you'll do

exactly what Alden tells you. Now, one thing more: what part of the border is still unquestionably loyal?"

Hero Giles frowned and shrugged his armor-clad shoulders a little helplessly beneath the splendid cloak of imperial green. "The gods alone know; but at the third division of this morning, Mayda and Thebes still vowed their loyalty. 'Tis there are quartered the phalanxes of the Imperial guards. They alone can I trust to the death."

"All right." Bending over a huge parchment map of the valley, Nelson nodded, and his keen black eyes became very serious. "I want you to concentrate every man you can muster in each of those cities. Meanwhile tell the populace,"—he drew a deep breath—"that Altara will certainly be returned to them."

"Art thou sure?" broke in the scarred veteran in the dented breast plate; then, his brow dark with doubt, he engaged Hero Giles and the rest in a heated, low-voiced colloquy.

Alden stepped near, an anxious frown on his unshaven

features. "Think this idea of yours is sure-fire?"

"No," Nelson's lean head shook. "I'm far from sure. It's a wild gamble at best, but we can't be any worse off than we are now. If the priests win out, we're sunk and no mistake about it; but there's a fighting chance my idea could be brought off."

"Now look here," objected the younger pilot tensely. "What's this rot about your going into Jarmuth alone? How d'you know they won't skin you alive once you're over the border?"

"I don't," admitted his friend, shrugging slightly. "But I don't see there's anything but to take the risk. If I don't go over there, sure as shooting we're going to feed some damn unpleasant kind of beast here in Atlans.

"Another thing," Nelson said, turning to the Hero who, surrounded by the others, was bent in deep consultation over a map. "How am I to know Altara if I see her? Is there a statue, a painting or something —?"

The Hero's aquiline features lit in a slow smile. "Nay, we have better than that. Come, thou shalt see the Sacred Virgin as she now is."

The members of the conference followed Hero Giles down a short corridor, through a couple of doors and into a chamber where a huge disc of crystal stood on edge fixed upon an axis above a bewildering array of wires, pipes and gauges.

Hero John, who seemed familiar with the mechanism, turned a lever, whereupon the disc commenced to spin like a pie plate on a dance floor. Faster and faster it spun, silently gathering speed each second while a low humming sound filled the chamber. Gradually the outline of the whirling disk commenced to brighten, tinting the scar-seamed, craggy features of the Atlantean generals and picking glorious, glowing lights from the jewels on Hero Giles' wonderfully engraved breastplate.

"Ah." Hero John turned a small dial. "The crystal warms. Look, oh Wanderers!"

Nelson rubbed his eyes incredulously, for in the heart of the shimmering circle had materialized the outline of a room with walls of yellow marble.

"Well, I'm damned!" gasped Alden. "See how it flickers!"

As the revolving disc of crystal gained top speed, the flickering subsided and a picture, clearer than most photographs, could be seen in the center. A wondrously slender, yellow-haired young girl clad in Grecian robes of pale blue sat in deep despond upon a plain wooden couch, with a black haired servant kneeling before her, apparently lacing sandals on her tiny, pink-hued feet.

"Bring closer the face," snapped Hero Giles gruffly.

Gradually the focus changed, like the close-up of a movie camera, until in the center of the madly whirling disc could be seen in minute detail and living color the face of an indescribably lovely girl.

"Whew," muttered Nelson, staring in silent

amazement. "No wonder they want her back! She makes Ziegfeld's little girls look like Armenian refugees." He cast a sidewise glance, but Alden had apparently not heard him; the younger American stood gazing with rapturous joy at the girl.

"Aye! Aye!" The two veteran generals uttered stifled groans and one of them drew a hand across his eyes. "Poseidon save her! Aye! Preserve the fair Altara."

"Wouldst thou not doubly save her, now?" demanded Hero John in a low voice that bespoke his anguish. He seemed suddenly older than the grim, helmeted veterans to either side.

"You bet! I guess a man sees a face like that only once in a lifetime. And now," Nelson continued with an effort to return to the practical, "there's no time to be lost—so I'd just like to take a look at those pteranodons of yours."

A few minutes later, the two aviators found themselves nearing a lofty structure which adjoined the imperial palace. It was constructed along the lines

of an immense aviary. Between beautiful, glistening Ionic columns of white marble, gleamed bronze bars, set at regular intervals to prevent the escape of the most appalling creatures which could ever have skimmed the air.

"What in the devil is your idea?" demanded Alden, taken aback. "God, look at the loathsome brutes!"

Some of these huge, flying reptiles were hopping awkwardly over the ground picking at bones and refuse littering the floor with long pelican-like bills, which were, however, very much thicker than those of pelicans, and set with sharp teeth at least six inches long.

"Not very pretty are they? Kind of look like huge bats," commented Nelson thoughtfully. "Wonder if they could be handled?"

"Yes, their wings are leathery. Look at 'em up yonder." Alden pointed to the roof of that immense aviary where, hanging head downwards like gigantic bats, must have been hundreds upon hundreds of the

pteranodons. One of them, whistling oddly, fluttered up to the bars, affording the Wanderers an excellent view of a loathsome head, the back of which ended in a curious sort of horn, that, projecting backwards, jutted far above its rear. Fierce, vermillion eyes with green irises glared at the Americans through the bars, and great wings of greasy-looking leather fanned a disgusting stench from the interior of the aviary.

"Sweet little things," was Alden's comment. "God! Imagine having one of those great things swooping down on you. Hey, Alden, look at that big devil over there! He must have a wing spread of thirty feet. Big as a Moth plane, isn't he?"

For answer the pteranodon clattered its vast beak savagely. One of the generals stooped and, catching up a huge slab of meat from a basket nearby, hurled it through the bars into the gaping jaws.

"What would ye with these creature?" demanded Hero Giles with undisguised curiosity.

"You'd be surprised." Nelson was not deliberately rude, but his mind was wrapped up in the daring project he had evolved. "I want a couple of the biggest of these caught and set aside in a courtyard where there will be no one looking on. If your people can train and handle podokos and allosauri—I guess a couple of Yanks ought to be able to manage these flying nightmares. So don't you worry about us."

Hero Giles uttered grim, significant laugh. "Thou hadst best manage them. I note yonder pteranodon is in need of nourishment."

Chapter 10

With sharp anxiety, Victor Nelson kept watching the towers of Jezreel rise ever clearer above the great, warm plain of Jarmuth, but, for all that, he noted how distinctly Jezreel differed from Heliopolis. The Jarmuthian capital was predominantly amber-yellow instead of white in color; its towers were flat-topped, angular, hideous structures that compared not at all favorably with the graceful Grecian architecture of Atlantean public buildings.

The populace, he decided, as he strode along in the midst of half a dozen silent guards, were as harsh and graceless as their architecture. Whereas the Atlanteans had been white skinned and uniformly red haired—save for those of Hudsonian blood—the inhabitants of Jarmuth almost without exception were black haired and had dark, olive-hued skins.

"They're the lost tribes of Israel, all right," Nelson decided after a brief sojourn in that savage land lying beyond Apidanus—the great boiling river, whose bubbling and scalding currents had for centuries

served as a natural boundary between the two realms. But now the Jarmuthian armies had crossed it and were steadily pushing back the demoralized and despairing Atlanteans with savage energy that heaped the dead in hillocks.

"Their armor," mused the ragged, barefoot prisoner, studying his silent guards, "looks a lot like a Roman legionnaire's, but that six pointed star on their helmets is pure Semitic. Yes, this sure is an Asiatic outfit."

His eyes wandered from one fierce, big-nosed infantryman to another and noted the splendid physical structure of the majority. Evidently hardier, much less refined and luxury-loving than the Atlanteans, these swart warriors disdained robes and other garments. Save for helmet, armor and brief black kilts, they were quite naked. Like the Atlantean hoplites the infantrymen carried spears, steam retortii and quantities of grenades.

The country side through which the prisoner passed had a holiday air, for garlands of flowers hung in

every doorway, and naked, pot-bellied children squatted by the roadside, industriously weaving crowns and streamers of gay blossoms.

"Look, Atlantean dog!" commanded the black-bearded leader of the escort. "Let thine infidel eyes gaze upon the mightiest city of the world. Seest thou yonder Ziggurat which o'er towers all others?"

Nelson raised eyes red-rimmed from sleeplessness and deep anxiety—for the crafty Jarmuthians had proved unexpectedly unwilling to credit him as the Atlantean outcast and would-be renegade he had pretended to be.

"Yes," he said in reply to the English-speaking *jehar's*—captain's—question. "What's it for?"

"'Tis the temple of the almighty Beelzebub, Steam God of Jarmuth. Without his hot breath no wheel would turn, our armies would be powerless and this land would perish under the ice of the outer world." The dark eyed officer's eye fell speculatively upon his bound and dust-covered prisoner. "Perchance, dog of

a spy, thou wilt die during to-day's fourth division(2) together with Altara, pale daughter of the feeble, false god Poseidon."

The Atlantean day was divided into six divisions of four hours each; due to the flame suns there was no sunrise or sunset.

This afternoon?

Nelson could not realize that the time had flown so quickly. Four short hours separated him from the crisis of his life. A thousand doubts assailed him. What if Alden or Hero Giles failed in their share of the great scheme for rescue? Narrowly, the aviator's eye searched the great, rich plain, then swept the amber-hued sky where, far above the plain, Jilboa, the nearest flame sun, beat off the Arctic chill and darkness.

The great, black-bearded jehar eased the straps from which was suspended the brass coil of his retortii. "Aye," he chuckled, his thick lips parted in a crafty smile. "Ere long will the fair flesh of Altara grace the

ceremonial board of His Exaltation, the King, and his priests and princes."

Nelson gasped in horror. The divinely beautiful Altara—butchered for meat like a calf? Grotesque! Ghastly! "What! You eat your prisoners?" He felt sick, nauseated.

For answer, the swart Jarmuthian raised an enormous hand and dealt the captive American a stinging cuff which made his teeth rattle.

"Peace!" he snarled. "Else I slit thy spying throat ere we pass yonder walls."

Fingering a short blue-black beard that was frizzed into tight curls in the Assyrian manner, the jehar lengthened his stride as the little detachment clanked into the shadow of a great wall surrounding Jezreel, and through a huge gate guarded by two hideous, jackal-headed effigies.

Hurrying into the city were throngs of eager men, women and children, interspersed with muscular,

black bearded soldiers who cast threatening, baleful eyes on the pale-skinned prisoner.

At first the great metropolis of Jezreel seemed boundless, for everywhere arose tall, massive monuments of yellow marble whose facades were engraved with Sanskrit characters, thus bearing out Nelson's surmise that this was indeed a race of Semitic origin.

Here and there hurried grey-bearded, vulture-eyed priests oddly garbed in corrupt Occhive and Tyrian regalia. Nelson found it odd to see the Tablet of the Laws, which Jarmuth so openly ignored, swaying on their yellow robed breasts; and none cried out more menacingly nor more loudly against the limping, wan-faced captive, than these same ecclesiastics, who must have long since forgotten all worship of Jehovah in the foul service of a bestial golden effigy.

A stone sailed through the air, narrowly missing the American; then another, which struck his shoulder.

"God, what a rough looking crowd," thought Nelson,

as the guards, cursing, held back the screaming mob. "At this rate I won't live to even reach the temple!"

Every second his life stood in great danger. Unkempt, sloe-eyed women hurled themselves, shrieking with fury, against the armored chests of the guards, who were hard pressed to beat them off with their spear hafts.

Nelson's one small ray of comfort in this evil hour was the fact that his .45 pistol remained untouched in a food wallet. At the border the jehar had cast one contemptuous glance at the weapon, but, no doubt deeming it some strange culinary tool, he had made no effort to remove it.

It was a continual struggle for the guards to win their way up a long flight of stairs, for ever the great stream of humanity grew denser and more menacing.

Nelson felt a violent sense of revolt grip his being. "I must win free," he thought. "If I fail, Alden dies, and—and—" For the first time he realised how much he wanted to actually see Altara. Like a clear cameo, an

image of her had remained fresh in his memory. Except for her Grecian garments she might have been a lovely, carefree English or American girl.

"And these decadent swine would sacrifice her!" The thought was sickening. Yet how could he prevent the pitiful tragedy?

Fortunately, a detachment of troops—tall, sinewy fellows with conical helmets, crested with six-pointed stars—reenforced the guards just as clawing hands began to snatch and tug at the prisoner's ragged Atlantean chiton of blue cotton.

Almost before he realized it, Nelson was dragged inside a great gloomy building and into a circular chamber where four eagle-featured elders sat in council beneath the six-pointed star of Sem. On approaching, the jehar in command sank on one knee and in humble salute raised both hands to the tribunal.

"A tough looking desk sergeant they've got," muttered the prisoner to himself as his eye met the chilling

regard of a lean, yellow-faced priest. "Wonder what I'm booked for?" Idiotically, he recalled being summoned before a traffic court, years back. "Guess I don't get off with vagrancy; it'll probably be everything from speeding to mayhem, with maybe arson and well-poisoning thrown in."

The deliberations of this ominous court proved to be appallingly short. The dour-faced elders merely put their heads together, muttered a few sentences, then straightened up almost immediately. The chief priest—he with the yellow face—thrust out his fist and made the immemorial signal of death by jerking his thumb at the black marble floor.

Before the outraged and astounded aviator could utter a word of protest, powerful guards seized and hauled him off down a dark, narrow passageway in which the fetid prison smell was very strong. Too wise to struggle against overwhelming odds, yet appalled at the thought of his impending doom, Nelson was dragged into a room where four or five furtive, enslaved Atlanteans, made dumb by the removal of their tongues, were engaged in a curious occupation.

On a bare stone bench, five other Atlantean captives were sitting in miserable silence. They made a grotesque array, for their heads were crowned with gay yellow and blue flowers, and the upper half of their perfectly formed bodies gleamed with an application of a sweet-smelling oil. About their wrists and waists were twined fragrant garlands of yellow roses which hid the leather straps confining their hands.

Struggling, Nelson was forced on to the bench, whereupon slaves, skipping to avoid the lash of a scarred, olive-hued slave driver, hurried to wash the newly arrived prisoner's limbs, face and hands. A weary-looking old slave with sunken, rheumy eyes listlessly pulled the blue chiton from Nelson's broad shoulders, and would have removed the food pouch had not the prisoner winked vigorously. The ministering slave glanced swiftly sidewise and, discovering the slave driver's attention directed to another corner, pulled the upper folds of the chiton over the food pouch and its precious contents, then set a crown of yellow roses more or less askew on the American's head. For all the peril of the situation

Nelson could not suppress a fleeting smile as the phrase, "For I'm to be Queen of the May, Mother," leaped nonsensically into his brain.

"Yes, I guess they are getting us all dolled up for a sacrifice of some kind." Nelson's heart began to pound at the thought. Then he fought for self control. It must be a hideously realistic nightmare! He, Victor Nelson, American citizen, a quiet birdman, member of the Caterpillar Club and ex-flight commander of the A. E. F. was about to be offered as a sacrifice to some hideous, pagan god? Nonsense! He'd wake up in a minute and hear the drone of a ship on the line.

He blinked, staring fixedly at a single ray of light that came streaming in through a small, barred window, then glanced sidewise at his fellow victims, who with Spartan indifference sat waiting for the end of all things. It was no dream!

From the tiny window came the shrill discordant braying of many trumpets, and a roar like that of a football crowd arose surprisingly near. In response, the slave driver lashed the gaudily bedecked

sacrificial victims to their feet with vicious cuts of his pliant whip, and herded them like a drove of calves down a very long passage, lit at intervals by those strange column lamps of incandescent gas. In their red glare the doomed six seemed as though already bathed in blood.

"Must be some crowd of people outside," muttered Nelson as a great gale of sound deafened him. Yonder the amber glare of the flame suns glimmered, and now it was his turn to step into the open!

On a sort of spiral roadway he paused, breathless, awed, bewildered, for there, eddying restlessly about the bases of towers and other huge structures, was a great sea of up-turned faces. To his surprise he found the passage he had followed opened perhaps halfway up what must be the great Ziggurat of Beelzebub. He judged the tower's height must be immense, for already the crowd was a good hundred feet below.

"Zarotoa! Zarotoa! ù Wlanka!" (Death to the victims!)

Nelson shivered. How terrible was the wild,

bloodthirsty clamor of that vast throng, when they beheld the six flower-decked prisoners appear upon the circular winding road which led to the lofty and wind-swept summit of the great conical pyramid of the people of Jezreel.

Behind the victims marched perhaps eighteen or twenty spearmen gorgeously uniformed in yellow and black painted armor. Their retortii were plated with gold, and in the center of a star forming the crest of each helmet was set a diamond large as a hickory nut.

Preceding the despairing prisoners marched a squad of tall, clean-shaven priests with great gold hoops in their ears. They blew mightily upon long, curved horns, and were followed by perhaps a dozen lithe, posturing girls, half clothed in diaphanous yellow robes. These priestesses swung golden censers which flung bluish clouds of aromatic smoke high into the humid air above.

Up and up, around and around the great tower temple, Nelson was dragged, while the vast city of Jezreel, palaces, towers, courts, dwellings and all, lay

like a great panorama below. Up and up, and the wind grew stronger while Nelson marvelled at the great height of the structure he was mounting. Immediately in front of him swayed the naked shoulders of the three captive Atlanteans; he could see rose petals from their crowns fluttering in the strong warm breeze sweeping that man-made pinnacle for the worship of a heathen god.

Despairingly, the American's eyes searched the horizon, to discover nothing but a few great birds wheeling lazily in the bronze-hued sky. Very clearly he could discern three of the flame suns, casting flame high from their peaks.

"Alden!" he groaned. "Oh God, Alden, don't fail me!"

Chilled by the fate in store, he scanned the dark and hostile faces below, but found no friendly visage.

Up and up. The procession was now nearing the summit.

There were hosts of poignant problems before him,

each vital if Altara and the Empire of Atlans were to be saved; but one primary question immediately confronted him. How could he get his hands free? He ventured a few words in English to the stolid Atlantean at his side, whereat the fellow only stared dully and shook his red, flower-crowned head.

He next tried to cautiously work loose his hands, but to no avail. The rope of plaited skin binding his aching wrists together was tough as any rawhide. Cursing, he abandoned the effort, and, as his eyes once more swept the great bloodthirsty throng below, he felt himself doomed indeed.

Chapter 11

Standing at last on the summit of the great Ziggurat, Nelson found himself staring up at the fearsome golden image of the dread demon Beelzebub. The god stood some twelve feet in height and had a hideous human face, but, in place of hair and beard, countless golden tubes writhed in all directions. From the end of one, the puzzled prisoner beheld several tiny feathers of steam creeping forth, indicating that these hairs were a species of steam vent.

When, with the other captives, he was made to halt near its base, he further discovered that the idol sat upon a throne of yellow marble, the sides of which were carved with Sanskrit characters, necessarily quite meaningless to the doomed aviator.

In a grim and silent rank before Beelzebub's feet, stood some six or eight priest-executioners bending their black-robed bodies against the strong wind which swept that ghastly pinnacle.

Just below the base of the image, Nelson noted

several great, copper coils, no doubt conducting steam from the interior of the Ziggurat. Between the knees of Beelzebub rested a huge, shallow bowl, the use of which puzzled the American not a little, for he saw that the base of this ornate receptacle was also wrapped with a number of steam coils. Two great hands, ending in cruel-looking claws, were stretched horizontally above the demon's knees, seeming to plead for victims.

Suddenly a deep toned brazen gong sounded somewhere below; the trumpeters blew an ear-piercing note; and, at a gesture from the high priest, four of the brawny executioner-priests leaped forward, seized one of the Atlantean victims, hurled him to the stone platform and, in an unbelievably short interval, strapped the shrieking wretch by wrists, elbows, knees and ankles to a long, brass rod. Slung like a dead deer from a rail, they lifted the helpless Atlantean, and, while five hundred thousand voices roared in acclaim the priests fitted the pole ends into notches above the hands of the idol with the effect that the idol actually seemed to be clutching its victim.

Then, from all the pipes composing the hair and beard of Beelzebub, sprang forth hissing spouts of snowy steam which, whipped by the rising wind, went whirling madly down the lee of the Ziggurat. At the same time, from the half open mouth of the demon issued a fearful, screaming howl, a thousand times louder than the whistle of a speeding locomotive. Deafening and barbaric, it was reechoed from a hundred towers and battlements.

A dreadful, exultant yell burst from the multitude below as the red-robed priest drew from beneath his garments a sickle-shaped knife that glittered evilly in the light of the flaming suns. Still chanting, he stooped and quickly made a deep incision over the heart of the victim. While a piercing, agonized shriek burst from the ashen lips of the doomed Atlantean, his bright life-blood began to splash into the golden bowl below where, due to the presence of the steam coils, it swiftly commenced to hiss and bubble. Very quickly the last scarlet drops had fallen.

Then while Nelson, sick and horrified, stood watching, the dead body on its pole was taken down,

unstrapped, and hurled, limp and red-spattered, to the next lower platform where other priests waited to dismember it for the ceremonial cannibalism soon to follow.

In rapid succession two more victims were slaughtered amid the blood-hungry cheers of the Jarmuthian populace. Now the great bowl hissed and bubbled with a generous supply of the dark red fluid, from which rose clouds of evil-smelling steam that fanned the hideous features above.

From below suddenly arose an excited shout far mightier than any which had preceded it, when the executioners, sweating from their exertions, now turned and, spying Nelson, hurried forward. Coincidentally, the American's bound hands disappeared beneath the chiton. Squaring his shoulders, he gripped the pistol, prepared to make a good end.

"They'll get me, but before I die I'll send at least two or three of these devils to hell," he thought. "Come on —"

But, for an inexplicable reason, the arch-priest beckoned back his satellites, while roar upon roar of terrific excitement swelled from the swarming mob below, and a shout which at last became distinguishable bid fair to split the heavens. "Altara! Altara! Altara!"

Slowly, the temporarily reprieved victim's muscles stiffened. He understood. The next victim was to be the fair Altara, sister of Altorius and Sacred Virgin of Atlans.

"Altara! Altara!" A rising hurricane of impassioned human voices thundered the name.

Suddenly, the desire to live burned doubly strong in the American's breast. He must somehow prevent this inhuman catastrophe. But how? How?

Stealing a quick glance over his shoulder, Nelson stifled a groan. The southern horizon remained clear, and put an end to hope. No help! He must fight it out to the end alone.

A rank of exultant, black-bearded priests now appeared at the head of the stairway, then a quartet of olive skinned, semi-naked priestesses joyfully clashing brass cymbals.

There came an interval—and Nelson's heart stood still as there appeared the lovely head and shoulders of her whom he had first seen in the heart of the revolving crystal. Even more fiercely, mad revolt at fate gripped him.

Through hot, strained eyes the American saw that the stately Altara was beautiful beyond all possible comparison, and that she seemed utterly unafraid in the hour of her dreadful death. The Atlantean maiden's large, clear blue eyes were fixed with calm resignation on the distant flame sun of Jilboa. On her curling golden hair had been set a circlet of ceremonial yellow roses, while her white, slender body was thinly covered with a scanty robe of yellow silk.

Slowly, and moving her small bare feet in a regal stride, Altara climbed the last few steps and stood

straight and unafraid before the hideous demon god of Jarmuth.

Thousands of frantic inner voices assailed the aviator's consciousness. "Save her! You must save her! She's too young, too beautiful to die!"

Like a vast maelstrom of sound, so swelled the lustful cry of the dark multitude at the base of the Ziggurat, while the arch-priest chanted his litany in a sort of triumphant exultation. Then, all at once, one of the executioners roughly tripped the golden haired girl, sprawling her helpless on the bloody stones; and, before Nelson could quite realize it, the slender, silver hued form lay limp and helpless between Beelzebub's bloody claws.

Like a dynamo furiously gathering speed, so buzzed Nelson's brain. He was going to save her—if only for a brief interval! One man against a nation. Through a raging mist of fury he saw the red-robed priest raise his lean arms; then the American's bound hands darted beneath the blue chiton to reappear immediately. No one saw the pistol, for every eye was

rivettted upon the gleaming, sickle-knife of the red priest. Like a voice from hell, that eery scream burst again from Beelzebub's throat as his priest stepped near, the knife raised.

Amid a deafening roar the sickle-knife flashed higher; but it never fell, for the red priest suddenly reeled, clutched his chest and, staring wildly, staggered sidewise, while the assembled priests stared thunderstruck. The deafening roar of Beelzebub, the clamor of horns and cymbals had drowned out the report. In superstitious awe the Jarmuthians leaped back, panic-stricken, from the convulsively writhing body of the red priest, which rolled crazily down the steps before the idol; but a high shout of terror rang out as he toppled off the summit and, like a discarded puppet, plunged down the precipitous side of the cone-like tower.

Again Nelson's pistol spat, and two of the executioners collapsed in kicking agony. Like an avenging fury, the American raged about the summit, the pistol in his bound hands dealing death right and left until panic seized the remaining priests, who,

with one accord, abandoned their weapons to rush headlong down the dizzy, winding roadway. In a trice, none but Altara, Nelson, the two Atlanteans and the fallen priests remained on the summit.

It was the work of a moment for the Atlanteans to cast loose Nelson's bound wrists, and he theirs; time was precious, for, from below, a furious cohort of spearmen were charging up the stairs, their dark features terrible in their wrath.

"Only four more shots!" The sickening realization dashed into Nelson's brain. "That'll never stop them." Then in the midst of his despair he saw an answer. Stepping back he fired twice full into the great steam coil circling the base of the idol.

Spang! Spang! His bullets smacked through the copper coil to puncture neat, round holes. As he fervently hoped, jets of live steam rushed through these vents with terrible force and bathed the head of the stairs with a scalding, blinding vapor. Howling like mad beasts, the agonized Jarmuthian hoplites fell back, while overhead Beelzebub bellowed incessantly,

shaking the sky with his hideous voice.

"That's better." But Nelson knew his triumph to be brief. "*Where in hell is Alden?*" he raged as with shaking hands he released the bewildered girl from the death bar after the two Atlanteans had lifted it and its fair burden from the claws of Beelzebub.

Picking up the swords and other weapons of the fallen priests the two Atlanteans uttered their deep-toned war cry of *Halor vàn!* and joyously prepared to die fighting, as furious roar on roar of wrath arose from the populace, infuriated at being cheated of their prey. But the black-armored temple guards dared not charge those twin steam jets barring their approach. Accordingly they tried other means.

Nelson's heart stopped as a small, dark object sailed up from below and clattered on the platform. It was a grenade. With the speed of thought, the American kicked it to the landing below, where it exploded, annihilating a detachment of Jarmuthians by drenching them with the terrible fungus gas. Heart bounding with savage joy, Nelson watched the deadly

green fog leap from the broken grenade and of its own accord settle on the nearest soldiers. With the usual astonishing speed there formed on the stricken soldiery that poisonous yellow mould, whose fungus-like shoots sprouted through nostrils and mouths. On the dense crowd below the bomb's effect was appalling, and no more grenades were hurled....

During the respite Nelson's anguished eyes once more swept the skies. He started. Was it true or was it a mirage? Far to the southward a small, black speck materialized in the orange-hued heavens. Good old Alden! Hope wavered in the American's breast. Could he and his two fellows beat off the infuriated Jarmuthians long enough? He doubted it.

A shower of spears sailed up, but because of the angle, their trajectory was too great, and like rays of death the lances flashed harmlessly overhead to plunge over the summit and wreak death among those on the other side.

Nearer and nearer came the black speck while from the populace a low shout of amazement arose.

Coincidentally Nelson's heart stopped; aghast, he saw that the steam was no longer hissing from the holes at the idol's feet! Evidently, the steam current had been shut off from below to allow the raging priests to lead their followers in a desperate charge up the stairs.

Marshalling an Atlantean to either side, Nelson sprang to the head of the stair and fired full in the face of gorgeously robed priests who staggered back screaming. But the others wavered only an instant.

"*Halor vàn!*" Both Atlanteans hurled spears retrieved from the abandoned weapons—and each struck down his man.

The American's eye flickered up. Yes, there came a strange, but welcome sight: a great creature with enormous, leathery pinions was circling down towards the tower top! A clashing of weapons brought Nelson's eyes earthwards. He joined in a furious *melée* at the stair top, like the Atlanteans, using a captured bronze sword. There came a deep groan as the right-hand Atlantean collapsed with a bloodied bronze spear point standing far out from between his

naked shoulder blades.

A swooping shadow fell across the slowly advancing attackers. Beholding that awesome creature the Jarmuthians cowered, hesitated; then in headlong panic they darted below, uttering howls of fear and pursued by the surviving Atlantean, who, gone berserk, must have shortly paid for his folly.

The pteranodon was now quite recognizable, and seated on a double saddle was Alden, skillfully guiding the ungainly monster by means of a curious bridle, by shifting his weight and by pressing certain nerve centers between the great reptile's leathery shoulders.

Down, down circled Alden until the great wings skimmed just above Beelzebub's ugly golden head.

Her courage strained beyond endurance, Altara screamed shrilly in fear as Alden guided the huge reptile to the summit and forced it to light.

"Quick!" shouted Alden. "They're coming back up!"

"All right!" Catching up the fainting girl, Nelson hurdled two or three fallen bodies, and, while Alden showered fungus bombs upon the returning Jarmuthians, he laid his precious burden across the saddle and secured her with straps specially designed for the purpose.

"All right, Dick," he snapped. "Get going!"

"But you?" Alden's brown face was terribly intent.

"I'm not going! This creature could never carry the three of us. It can't, I tell you! Hurry, those devils are coming!"

Alden folded his arms. "If you don't go, I don't."

"All right then," snarled Nelson, vaulting into the saddle after casting loose the inert, yellow-robed girl. "Be a damned fool! We'll all die now."

It was a near thing, for the pteranodon, scenting the fresh blood, was very loath to obey its master, and scuffed awkwardly around the tower top two or three

times, while Nelson, clutching Altara to him, expended his last shot in driving back the enemy.

At last, the pteranodon spread its huge brown pinions and took off. Then Nelson gasped in alarm, for, unaccustomed to the heavy weight it now bore, the pteranodon scaled earthwards with the speed of a meteor, wildly flapping its bat-like-wings. Down! Down! Nelson had an impression of people scattering like frightened ants.

Alden cursed, tugged furiously on the bridle, and set his weight back in the saddle, but to no avail. Down! Ever down! The pteranodon now struggled among the tall buildings.

A sickening sense of defeat gripped Nelson as a long jet of steam shot out from a huge brass retortii mounted on the roof of an arsenal. The scalding fingers of steam just missed its target, but fortunately served to sting the descending pteranodon. With a convulsive shudder and a whistling scream, the hideous reptile commenced to flap its gigantic wings faster, and, slowly but surely, began to rise over the

yellow temples and towers of the barbarous city of Jezreel.

What followed is now a matter of Atlantean history. On its pages is set forth in full detail how the giant pteranodon barely crossed the boiling river to sink exhausted in the outskirts of Tricca.

There, also, is described the series of tremendous battles in which the Atlanteans, led by Altorius and inspired by the return of their Sacred Virgin, employed the terrible fungus gas to overwhelm the Jarmuthian invaders, driving them back with great slaughter to the steaming plains of their own land.

At even greater length is described the great triumph Altorius accorded the victorious aviators on the occasion of Victor Nelson's marriage to Altara.

"Doth it not seem strange," she whispered as they stood looking out over the great, sleeping city of Heliopolis, "that thou of the New World and I of the Lost World, should stand man and wife?"

The American's tanned face softened. "My darling," he whispered, "there are lots of strange things in the new Atlantis—but this isn't one of them."

March 1931

73 When the Mountain Came to Miramar by Charles Willard Diffin

summary goes here

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

The first tremor that set the timbers of the house to creaking brought Garry Connell out of his bunk and into the middle of the floor. Then the floor heaved and 'dobe walls swayed while the man fought to keep his footing and pull himself through the doorway to the safety of the dark night. The earthquake that came with the spring of 1932 was on.

It is magic against magic as Garry Connell bluffs for his life with a prehistoric savage in the heart of Sentinel Mountain.

He was nauseated with that deathly sickness that only an earthquake gives, and he dropped breathlessly in the shelter of a date palm while the earth beneath him rolled and groaned in agony. A deeper roar was rising above all other sounds, and Connell looked up at the nearby top of Sentinel Mountain.

The stars of the desert land showed clear; the grim blackness of Sentinel's lone peak rose abruptly from the sand of the desert floor in darker silhouette against the velvet of a midnight sky. And the mountain was roaring.

Softened by the distance, the deep, grumbling bass sang thunderingly through and above the other noises of the night, as if old Sentinel itself were voicing its remonstrance against this disturbance of its age-long rest.

The grumbling died to a clatter of falling boulders a hundred yards away at the mountain's base, and Connell's eyes discerned a puff of vaporous gray, a cloud of wind-blown dust, high up on the mountain's flank.

"Holy cats!" said Garry explosively, "what a slide! That must have ripped the old boy wide open."

His eyes followed the white scar far up on the mountainside, followed it down to the last loosened stones that had crashed among the date palms of Miramar ranch. "I don't just like the idea of the whole mountain moving in on me," he told himself; "I'll have to go up and look at that to-morrow."

It was afternoon of the following day when Garry rolled blankets and food into a snug pack and prepared for the ascent. "Guess likely I'll sleep out to-night," he mused and looked at the pistol he held in his hand.

"I don't want that thing slapping against me," he argued; "too darned hot! And there's nothing to use a gun on up on Sentinel.... Oh, well!" He threw the holster upon his bunk and dropped the automatic into the pack he was rolling. "I'll take it along. Might meet up with a rattler."

He brushed the sandy hair from his wet forehead and

straightened to his full six feet of slender height before he slipped the straps of his pack about his shoulders. And a broad grin made pleasant lines about his gray eyes as he realized the boyish curiosity that was driving him to a stiff climb in the heat of the day.

There was no real trail up the thousand-foot slope of Sentinel Mountain. Prospectors had been over it, doubtless, in earlier days, but in all of Garry's twenty-one years no one besides himself had ever made the ascent.

There was nothing in all that solitary, desolate peak to call them; nothing, for that matter, to beckon Garry, except the hot desert days, the cool breath of evening and the glory of nights when the stars hung low over all the miles of sand and sagebrush that reached far out to the rippling sand-dunes shimmering in the distance. Nothing, that is, but the "feel" of the desert—and young Garry Connell was desert-born and bred.

He stopped once and dropped his pack while he mopped his wet face. From this point he could see his

own ranch spread below him. Miramar, he had named it—"Beautiful Sea." The name was half an affectionate mockery of this land where the nearest water was fifty miles away, and half because of the sea of blue that he looked at now. Garry had never ceased to wonder at the mirage.

It was always the same in the summer heat—a phantom ocean of water. Garry's eyes loved to follow the quivering blue expanse that seemed so cool and deep. It rippled softly away to end in a line of white, like distant breakers on the horizon's rolling dunes.

This had been the bed of an ocean in some distant past, and that ancient ocean could never have seemed more real than this; yet Garry knew that this sea would vanish with the setting sun. He had watched it often.

A hundred yards farther and he stopped again. It was no well-trodden path that Garry followed, but he knew his landmarks. There was the big split rock a half mile ahead, and the three-branched cactus beside it. But between these and the place where Garry stood was a

fan-shaped sweep of boulders—and this where smooth going had been before.

He forgot for the moment all discomfort. He stood staring under the hot sun that cast purple shadows beside the weathered rocks, and his eyes followed up the scarred mountainside.

"That whole ledge that stood out up there—that's gone!" he told himself. "The whole side of the mountain just shook itself loose...."

Far above, his eyes found another towering mass that reared itself menacingly. "That will come down next time," he said with conviction, "and I don't want to be under it when it breaks loose." Then his searching eyes found the lower ledge and its shattered remains.

It had held a welter of rocks above it as a dam holds the pressure of water—and the dam had burst. The torrent of stone from above had swept into motion and carried with it the accumulation of loose rubble below. Where the ledge had been was now a cliff—a sheer wall of rock. It had been covered before by the

talus that was swept away.

Garry's eyes narrowed to see more plainly under the sun's glare. He was staring not alone at the cliff but at a shadow within it—a black shadow in the white face of the cliff itself.

"That was all covered up before," Garry stated; "buried for thousands of years, I suppose. But it can't be a cave; not a natural one, at least. There are no caves in this rock."

He stopped at times for breath, and his wonder grew as he climbed and the black mark took clearer form. At last he stood panting before it, to stare deep into the utter blackness of a passageway beyond an entrance of carved stone.

It was carved; there was no mistaking it! Here was a passage that nature had never formed. He took a quick stride forward to see the tool marks that showed on hard walls where symbols and figures of strange design were carved. An intrusion of harder rock had formed a roof, and they had cut in below—

"They!" He spoke the word aloud. Who were "they?"

He remembered the scientist who had stopped at the ranch some time before, and he recalled enough of the talk of Aztec and Toltec and Mayas to know that none of these old civilizations could explain the things he saw.

"This goes way back beyond them—it must," he reasoned. And there were pictures, long forgotten, that came to his mind to show him a vision from the past—figures whose coppery faces shone dark above their brilliant, colored robes—slaves, toiling and sweating to drive this tunnel into solid rock. He was suddenly a-quiver with a feeling of the presence of living things. His breath seemed stifled within him as he stepped into the dark where a pencil of light from his pocket-flash made the blackness more intense.

He tried to shake off the feeling, but an indefinable oppression was heavy upon him; the weight of the uncounted centuries these walls had seen filled him with strange forebodings.

His feet stumbled and scuffed over chips of stone; he steadied himself against the wall at times as he followed the corridor that went down and still down before him. It turned and twisted, then leveled off at last, and Garry Connell drew himself up sharply with a quick-drawn breath.

His flash was making a circle of light a dozen steps ahead, and showed a litter of sharp stone fragments. And, scattered over them, a tangle of bones shone white; one skull stood upright to stare mockingly from hollow sockets. The sudden white of them was startling in the black pit.

"Bones!" he said, and forced himself to disregard the echoes that tried to shout him down; "just bones! And the old-timers that wore them haven't been using them for thousands of years." He moved forward with determined steps to the end of the passage that finished in solid stone. He stopped abruptly. At closer range was something that froze him to a tense, waiting crouch.

This wall of solid stone—it was not solid as it had

seemed. There was a doorway; the stone was swung inward; and at one side in a straight-marked crack, he saw a thread of light.

He snapped off his own flash. Someone was there! Someone had beaten him to it! He held himself crouched and rigid at the thought. But who could it be? The utter silence and the steady, unchanging, pale-green light showed him the folly of the thought. There was no one there; there couldn't be anyone.

His hand, that trembled with excitement, reached across and over the skeleton remains posted like a ghostly guard before the door. He threw his weight upon the stone.

Its bearings groaned, but it moved at his touch. The stone swung slowly and ponderously into a silent room, and Garry Connell stared wide-eyed and wondering where rock walls, in carved and colored brilliance reflected the softest of diffused light.

A great room, hewn from the solid rock!—and Garry tried to see it and all that it held at one glance. He

grasped the extent of the stone vault, a hundred feet across; the distant walls were plain in the soft light.

One high point of flashing color caught his eye and held it in marveling amazement. A thing of beauty and grace. It was a shining, silvery shape like a mushroom growth; it towered high in air, almost to the ceiling, a slender rod that swelled and opened to a curved and gleaming head. Graceful as a fairy parasol, huge enough to shelter a giant, it was like nothing he had ever seen.

But there was no time now for conjectures. He made no effort to understand; he wanted only to see what might be here; and his eyes flashed quickly over sculptured walls and a stone floor where metal boxes were arranged in orderly rows.

Hundreds of them, he estimated; huge cases, some eight or ten feet long. Two nearby were raised above the floor on bases of carved stone. Lusterless gray in color—metal, unmistakably—and in them....

"No use getting all hopped up over treasure hunting,"

Garry had told himself. But under all his incredulous amazement had been flickering thoughts of what he might find.

He stared hungrily at those two boxes near him. Each of the hundreds was big enough to hold a fortune. He reached for a metal bar beside the scattered bones, and, like a man in a sleep-walking dream, he stepped across those relics of earlier men and entered the room that they had guarded.

The light stopped him for a moment. He puzzled over it; stared wonderingly at a circle of glowing radiance in the roof of stone. It reminded him of something ... the watch on his wrist ... yes, that was the answer—some radio-active substance. His eyes came back to the nearest chest, and he jammed the point of his corroded bar beneath the flange of a tight-fitting lid.

The hidden room was cool, but Garry Connell wiped the sweat from his eyes when he ceased his frantic efforts. The metal bar clanged loudly upon the floor beside him. He stood, breathing heavily, his eyes on the metal cover that refused to move. And in the

silence there came to him again that strange, prickling apprehension. He caught himself looking quickly behind him as if to find another person there.

His eyes were accustomed now to the pale light, and the sculptured figures on the walls stood out with startling distinctness. Garry turned to look at the nearer wall and the figure that was repeated over and over again.

It was a man, tall and lean, his robes, undimmed by the years, blazed in crimson and gold. But the face above! Garry shivered in spite of himself at the devilish ugliness the artist had copied. It was dead black in color, with slitted eyes that had been touched up artfully to bring out their venomous stare. The head itself rose up to a rounded point that added to the inhuman brutality of the face.

He was seated on a throne, Garry saw, and other figures, less skilfully carved, were kneeling before him. Again, he was standing above a prostrate enemy, a triple-pointed spear raised to deliver the final blow.

Silently, Garry let his eyes follow around the room with its repetition of the horrible being who was evidently a king. Then he whistled softly. "Nice kind of hombre, he must have been," he said. And, "Boy," he told the carved image familiarly, "whoever you were, you've been dead a long time, and I don't mind telling you I'm glad of it."

He was slowly circling the first casket. Beyond it was the slender rod with its mushroom head that seemed more like a bell as he looked from below. The head's inner surface was emblazoned, like the figures on the wall, with crimson and gold in strange designs. He saw now that the base of it was connected with a smaller box, placed like the two beside it on a stone pedestal.

He came slowly beside it to study the box with narrowed eyes. He expected the metal cover would be as immovable as the others, and he started back and caught his breath sharply as the metal raised at his touch and the green radiance from above flashed back from within the box in a thousand scintillant lights. Then he stooped to see the brilliant, silvery

sheen of metal wheels that moved on jeweled bearings.

A mechanism of some sort—but what? he wondered. He had some knowledge of the stream of electrons that discharged continuously from the light above, and he knew how they could charge an electroscope that would automatically discharge to produce motion. He nodded in half-understanding as the fluttering gold-leaf fell and allowed a tiny wheel to move one notch in its escapement.

"Clockworks!" he told himself—it was as near as he could come to a name for the machine—"and it's been running here all this time.... What for, I wonder? What was it supposed to do?"

He stared again at the bell-shape towering above him, but its purpose was beyond guessing: it was a part of the machine. His eyes came back to the mechanism itself. There was a splinter of stone.... Garry reached for it unthinkingly, but his hand was checked in mid-air.

The fragment was wedged beneath a tiny lever, holding it erect. "That's the answer," Garry whispered. "The machine was left open,"—he felt of the cover that had been dented by some heavy blow, and saw sharp splinters of rock beneath his feet—"a rock fell from the roof, flaked off and dropped onto the machine, and a splinter jammed this little lever. But the machine has been ticking along...."

His fingers reached for the stone.

"Let's go!" he said, and grinned broadly at the thoughts that were in his mind. "Let's see what the machine would have done!"

The fragment came away within his hand, and he saw the lever fall slowly. There was motion within the case—wheels and shining spheres that touched one upon another were spinning in gleaming circles of silvery green—and from above he heard the first faint whisper of a sound.

It came from the bell, and Garry drew back to stare upward. The first soft humming of the clear bell-note

was incredibly sweet. It rose in pitch while the volume increased, till the musical note was lost in the rising roar that resounded from walls and roof. Higher it rose; it was a scream that was human in its agony, prodigious in its volume!

Garry Connell stood trembling with unnamed fear. This sound was unbearable; it beat upon his ears; it battered his whole body; it searched out every quivering nerve and tore at it with fingers of fire. Still higher!—and the scream was piercing and torturing his brain. He felt the jerk of uncontrollable muscles.

The whirling machine was a blur of light, and he longed with every fibre of his tortured mind to throw himself upon it—into it!—anything to end the unbearable impact from on high. His body, assailed by a clamor that was physical torment, could not move; the vibrations beat him down with crushing force, while the shrieking voice rose higher, then grew faint, and, with a final whisper, died to nothingness.

And still Garry felt himself sinking; the room was blurred; the excruciating agony of tortured nerves

melted into a lethargy that swept through him. Dimly he sensed that the monstrous, quivering, bell-topped thing was still launching its devastating rain of vibrations; they were above the range of hearing; but he felt his body quivering in response to the unheard note. Then even these vague fragments of understanding left him. The towering, soundless thing was indistinct ... it vanished in the darkness that closed about....

He was upon the floor in a crouching heap when the tremors that shook him ceased. His mind, in the same instant, was cleared, and he knew that the soundless vibrations from the bell had ended. A wave of thankfulness flooded through him, and he luxuriated in the utter silence of the room—until that silence was broken by another sound.

It was hard and metallic, like the click of a withdrawn bolt, and came first from the case at his side. A second sharp rap replied from the other raised casket, then an echoing tattoo of metallic impacts rattled and clattered in the resounding room. Each of the hundreds of caskets was adding its voice to the

clacking chorus.

The paralysis that had held Garry's muscles was gone, and he came slowly to his feet to see the edge of the cover he had tried vainly to move, rising smoothly in the air. His eyes darted about; the second casket was opening; beyond were countless others; the room was alive with silent motion where metal lids lifted like petals of flowers unfolding to the sun.

The machine had done it! The conviction came to him abruptly. Those vibrations that had beaten him down had done this: some unlocking mechanism within each case had been actuated when the vibrations reached the proper pitch. Then the thoughts were driven from his mind by a more thrilling conviction: The caskets were open! The treasure! Who could know what some of them might contain? He took one quick step toward the nearer of the two.

One step!—and his reaching hands stopped motionless above the open case. The contents of the box were plain before him—and he stared in horror at the black, half-naked figure of a man as silent and

unmoving as its counterpart upon the wall.

Black as a carving in ebony, it was the face that held Garry's eyes. He saw the pointed head, the thin lips half-drawn from snarling teeth, the expression of brutal savagery that even this frozen stillness could not conceal.

The eyes were closed; Garry saw their slitted lids. He was looking at them when they quivered and twitched. The lids opened slowly, drew back from staring eyes that were cold and dead—eyes that came suddenly to life, that turned and stared unwinkingly, horribly, into his.

Garry's lips were moving as he drew back in slow retreat, but he heard no sound of his own voice, only a husky whisper that said over and over again: "Mummies! Caskets of mummies! And they're coming back to life!"

Suspended animation. He had heard of such things. Dim, fleeting remembrance of what he had read came flashingly to him—toads that had lived a thousand

years sealed up in rock—but this, a human thing, a man!—no, no!—it couldn't come to life; not after all this time!

The pointed head, the ugly, menacing face and the body of dead black that rose slowly within the casket gave his argument the lie. In dreadful, living reality he saw the thing before him as it stretched its corded neck, extended and flexed its long, black arms and breathed deeply through lips drawn thin. Then, with a bound of returning energy, it leaped out and down to stand half-naked and black, towering threateningly above his head.

And Garry, too stunned to feel a sense of fear, looked first at the living face before him and then at the carvings done in stone. There was too much here for instant comprehension; his reason could not follow fast enough where facts were leading, and his mind seemed groping for some certain, proven thing.

"It's the same one that's on the wall," he explained painstakingly to himself. "It's the king, the old boy himself! I said he would be a bad hombre; I said he

was a bad one—"

He saw the other raise his hands threateningly, and he crouched to meet the attack. But the black hands dropped, and the scowling face turned, while Garry's eyes followed toward a sound of movement in the second casket.

The green light flooded down, and Garry Connell glanced quickly at the doorway. Too many of these blacks and this would be no safe place for him. He was expecting another apparition like the first; he would have thought himself prepared against any further surprise, but his gray eyes opened wide at what the light disclosed.

There was the casket, gray and lusterless on its low, stone base. Its cover, like the others, stood erect, and above the nearer edge an arm was raising. But it was a white arm, and it ended in a slim, white hand!—its rounded softness held in clear outline against the back ground of gray, until the arm fell that the hand might grip the metal edge.

Garry's eyes held in wondering fascination upon those slender white fingers. The hand of a woman—a girl!—what marvel of miracles was this? He held his silent pose while he stared at the face that appeared before him.

It was milk-white against the dull gray metal beyond, the white of death itself, until returning circulation brought a flush of pink that crept slowly to the rounded cheeks. Dark hair cascaded about the shoulders to mingle with a lacy veil of golden threads. A film of golden lace wrapped about her—her robes had gone to dust, vanished with the vanished years—and only the threads of gold with which the robe was shot remained, a futile concealment for the slim white of her shoulders, the soft curves of rounded breasts. But Garry's eyes were held by the eyes that looked and locked with his.

Dark eyes, deep and steady, yet glowing softly with the wonder of this awakening. Windows, crystal clear, through which shone softly a light that filled him through and through!

Alluring as was the rounded whiteness of the form so thinly veiled, it was not this nor the childlike beauty of the face that held him spellbound. Garry Connell's only love had been the desert, and now he was filled and shaken by the glamour from within these thrilling eyes.

A rasping word made echoes in the silence, and Garry saw the girl's eyes widen as she turned them upon the black one, who had spoken. He saw her face lose its color and go dead white, and plainly her wide eyes showed the fears that swept in upon her with returning remembrance.

Garry followed her gaze to the wild figure whose slitted eyes glittered in savage triumph and possessiveness at the white beauty of the trembling girl. The lean figure spoke again in that rasping, unintelligible voice—he addressed the girl now—and the tone sent a strange prickling of animosity through every fibre of the watching man.

The black one took one stride forward; the girl, in a flash of white and gold, sprang from her resting place

to take shelter behind the high casket. Her eyes came back to Garry's, and the call for help though voiceless was none the less real.

Then her pale lips moved, and she called to him with a clear voice that uttered unknown words.

Garry came from the spell that bound him, and with a quick rush made between her and the advancing man. He landed tense and crouching, and his voice was hoarse with excitement when he spoke.

"That'll be all from you," he told the black one.



His words could mean nothing to this savage, but the tone that rang through them, and his crouching, ready pose, must have been plain. The inky face beneath the high-pointed dome of head was twisted with rage; the eyes glared at this being who dared to oppose him. But the black one paused, then stepped backward to the casket where he had been.

Garry retreated a few slow steps to the end of the metal box that sheltered the girl. "Can't you understand me?" he asked. "Am I dreaming? What has happened? Who are you, and who is this black beast? What does it all mean?"

Again he was sure that mere speech useless, but he felt that he had to speak, to say something, anything, to prove the reality of his own waking self and of the wild, nightmare experience.

He saw the crouching girl rise to her full height; he saw the movement of her hand as she swept the dark hair away from her face, and the film of gold lace clung closely about her as she came to his side. One hand was outstretched to rest, light and cool, upon

his forehead.

He heard her voice, so soft and liquid yet so charged with terror. She spoke meaningless words and phrases, but at the touch of her hand upon his face he started abruptly.

Did the words themselves take on meaning and coherence, or was it something within himself?—Garry could not have told. But, with the startling clarity of a radio switched full on, he got the impress of her thoughts, and his own brain took them and put them into words that he knew.

"You will help me, you will save me," the words were saying. "You are one of us, I know. You are a stranger, but your skin is white; you are not of the tribe of Horab."

Garry was motionless and listening. He knew he was sensing her thoughts—she was communicating with him by some telepathic magic—and he knew, as he caught the words, that Horab was the black one there before him, reaching and feeling within the casket

where he had slept. Horab—a savage king of a savage land—

"He captured me," the words continued in breathless haste. "I am from Zahn: do you know the good land of Zahn? I am Luhra. Horab captured me; carried me here to this island; it was yesterday he brought me here. He put me to sleep, and he put his men to sleep, hundreds of his chosen warriors. He worked his magic, and he said we would sleep for one hundred summers. But it was yesterday. And now you will save me; my father is a great man; he will reward you—"

The sentences flashed almost incoherently into his mind, but ceased at a sound and stirring from the room at their backs.

Garry needed a moment for the substance of the message to register. He had heard it as truly as if she had spoken: Horab had captured her—yesterday!... And his own lips that had been loose with astonishment closed to a grim smile.

"Yesterday!" She thought it was yesterday that her

long night had begun. Did Horab know the truth? Garry was suddenly certain that he did. Horab's plans had miscarried; he could not know how far in a distant past was that day when he had placed himself and this girl in their caskets, safe in their mountain tomb.

Only an instant for these thoughts to form—then his eyes were steady upon the tall savage who had found what he sought in the big metal case. Horab, king of a vanished race, turned now with a heavy scepter in his hand; and its jeweled head flashed brilliantly as he raised it high in air and shouted an echoing command into the room. A white hand was tugging at Garry's shoulder, a soft body clinging close, to turn him where new danger threatened.

The other caskets! He had forgotten them, and he saw the nearer ones alive with struggling forms. A black man-shape, with sullen, animal face and pointed head, came slowly erect and staggered upon the floor. Another—and another! There were scores of the black, naked men who scrambled from the nearer caskets and swayed drunkenly upon their feet.

Garry stood tense, his mind a chaos of half-formed plans. This one brute he might handle, but the whole tribe—that was too large an order. Yet he knew with an unshakable conviction that he would carry this girl from their evil clutches or die in the trying.

Feminine charms had failed to interest Garry in that world outside, but now the message of these soft eyes, the appealing beauty of this lovely face, proud and unafraid despite her fears, the hand so soft and trusting upon his face!—there had something entered into Garry Connell's lonely life that struck deep within him and found a ready response.

He swept one arm about the soft, yielding body beneath its wisp of garment, and he swung her behind him as he set himself to meet the attack. And he flashed her a look that must have carried a message, for the trembling lips were framing a ghost of a smile as her eyes met his.

Garry's thoughts darted to the gun, but his tightly-wrapped pack was in the passage outside. He prayed for a moment's time that he might meet this mob

pistol in hand, and he half turned; but no time was given. The leader was shouting orders, his harsh voice resounded in shattering echoes throughout the stone vault, and the horde of blacks surged forward at his command.

A mass of lean bodies, with faces ugly and brutal where sleep-filled eyes opened wide and glaring! They crowded upon him, and Garry met the rush with a rain of straight rights and lefts into the nearest faces. He was carried backward to the wall by the weight of their numbers, but he saw some go down for the count.

The room seemed filled with leaping, shouting men. Their shrill cries echoed in a tumult of discord, and above all Garry heard the hoarse screams of their leader.

There were fists and arms clubbing at his head. He warded them off, then sprang from the wall, leaping outward and sideways, where there was room for free swings of his pounding fists. Another black face went blank under the impact of his blow—a second—and a

third!

He was giving ground slowly as the others came on. Then beyond the crowding figures he saw one who held a trident spear high in air. The weapon was poised; the metal points shone in the green light—points that would tear his body to shreds at a single blow.

Garry paused but an instant, then opened his clenched fists to clutch the lean neck of an enemy before him. He whirled the man's body and held it as a shield while he reached vainly to grip at the thrusting spear. Dimly he saw the flash of white and gold where the girl, Luhra, threw her own body upon the armed figure and clung in desperation to the shaft of the deadly weapon.

Garry hung fast to the struggling body, that was his shield; there were other spears now that flashed in the air. He loosed one hand and landed a short jab in the face of a savage whose hands were at his throat. The blow was light, and he was amazed to see the man stagger and fall. There were others who swayed

helplessly and stumbled to their knees. Spears rang sharply, clattering upon the stone.... They were falling. The body he held went suddenly limp within his arms and sagged heavily to the floor....

Garry saw the one who had threatened him drop; he took the girl with him as he fell, and his spear flew wildly from his open hand. Garry was alone!—and the enemy was only a tangle of sprawling bodies where the twitching of an outflung arm marked the last sign of life.

He was breathing hard, for some of the enemies' blows had landed, and he staggered as he wiped a trickle of blood from his eyes. No time to figure what this meant, but the blacks were certainly out of it. Beyond the huddled bodies the tall figure of Horab leaped wildly in air as he sprang forward, and in the same instant Garry threw himself between the black menace and the prostrate girl.

He staggered again as he landed from his wild leap, and he called for his last reserve of strength to put power behind the blow that he launched for the

snarling face above.

The heavy scepter swung high, and was falling as Garry struck. He saw the blow start; saw the fiery arc the jeweled head made in descending like a mace above his head. Then the face of Horab vanished, and the room was a whirling place of flashing red and yellow before blackness blotted it out....

Garry awoke to blink stupidly at a green light above him. His head was a blinding, throbbing pain that blurred his thoughts.

It cleared slowly. The gleaming figure of a girl was rising from the floor. His aching eyes saw the white of her young body through the dull glow of golden lace. Her eyes came to his, and sharply he realized that this was no dream—this cave whose walls seemed swaying, the face that was staring pitifully at him, and, beyond, in a ghastly green light, the dark silhouette of a lean man who bent his pointed head above a chest.

Connell's mind was a whirl of snarled thoughts and

emotions, of puzzled wonder and fighting rage; yet strangely through and above them all was a feeling of pure joy in the message of the eyes in a face that was utterly lovely.

The black figure had opened the chest. Garry saw the luminous green about it shot through with the reflected radiance of many gems. Jewels cascaded brilliantly from the lean black hands as they withdrew a golden cord. Part of some gem-incrusted fabric, it was, that he tore roughly from its rotted fastenings before coming swiftly to the still helpless body of Connell.

Garry's struggles were futile; his hands were tied before him. The shooting pain of a prodding spear brought him from the paralyzing numbness that held him, and he came dizzily to his feet. Again the walls whirled, and he would have fallen headlong but for a lithe, soft body that sprang close to throw white arms about him.

Through blood-shot eyes he saw Luhra, of the land of Zahn, with head held high and flashing eyes as she

turned squarely to face the savage black. And he heard the stream of strange sentences that she poured protestingly upon him.

Her message broke off abruptly. Garry's eyes followed hers to watch a savage king, naked but for the tattered remnants of robes that time had eaten. He was reaching, into a casket that had once held kingly raiment—reaching with a lean black hand that brought forth only fragments of purple and crimson cloth that went quickly to dust within his hands.

Garry saw the slitted eyes stare in puzzled wonder at the rotted cloth, then glance sharply and inquiringly about. He saw the black one place a jeweled head-dress of barbaric splendor upon his ugly, pointed head, then rise and cross slowly to the heap of bodies. Spear in hand, he passed on to the serried rows of caskets.

Those nearest were empty, as Garry knew; he had seen the eruption of life from within them. Horab, with a growled word, moved on to the other caskets that stretched out across the room. The ugly head

stooped; again the hands reached down, to come back this time with an empty, gleaming skull.

Garry thought once of his pistol, but knew in the same thought that he could never reach it; the spear of Horab would crash through him at the first movement. He dismissed the thought—forgot it—and forgot all else in the fascination of beholding the sagging lips and the scowling stupefaction on the black face of Horab. And slowly there came to his throbbing brain an explanation.

One hundred summers, Luhra had said—Horab had meant to sleep for a hundred years—and the machine that was to waken him had failed to function. Ages beyond computing had passed, and these two only, the black king and the girl, had survived. They had been directly beneath the light; its flooding energy had brought them safely through the dreamless years. But, for the others, it had been different.

Those nearest the light had responded to the vibrating call, but their vitality was gone; their moment of life was short. As for the hundreds who

had felt the light but faintly—the skull told the story. They had died as they slept, died thousands of years ago, and their skeletons were all that remained to mock at their king and the frustration of his plans.

But what was the purpose of the long sleep? Luhra's touch and her soundless words supplied the answer.

"Why did he wish this?" her mind said, repeating his question. "Horab's own country was lost; the yellow-ones from across the great water had conquered and overrun it. But Horab had planted the seeds of disease, and the yellow ones must all die in time. Horab is a king and a worker of magic; he is in league with a devil; he learns his magic of him. We of Zahn, all feared the magic of Horab—" She stopped at the quiver of rock beneath their feet.

Garry's mind had cleared, but it was an instant before he knew that the movement was not in his own throbbing head. Then the earth tremor came unmistakably, and his thoughts flashed back to the mass of rock above the mouth of the cave. If more quakes were coming they must get out, and do it at

once—

The black hand of King Horab cast the skull vindictively against the wall, and the clatter of its falling fragments mingled with strange oaths from the savage lips. Then he came toward the two and Garry searched his mind desperately for some means of escape.

The trident spear was aimed, and Garry waited for the throw. He felt, more than saw, the flash of light that was Luhra as she sprang for a spear beside the fallen men. An instant and she was before him, tense and poised, a golden Amazon, whose upraised arm and steady eyes checked even Horab in his advance.

She spoke to the savage in sharp, staccato phrases, but Garry got no meaning from the words. There was a quick interchange between them; vehement protest and shaking of his poised spear on the part of Horab. Luhra added a word or two, and she lowered her weapon as Horab did the same.

Her head was bowed as she reached to touch Garry's

forehead. He sensed a hopeless sorrow that was so plainly hers, but with it he felt a mingling of another emotion that stirred him to the depths of his being. The slim, white figure straightened, and the dark eyes squarely upon his when she spoke.

"Listen carefully," she said; "it is the last time—"

Garry found himself trembling; he was suddenly breathless with emotion. The racking pain in his head had settled to a dull ache, but his brain was clear, and through it were flashing strange thoughts.

The threat, the wild adventure itself!—they were nothing before the truth that was so plain to him now. He loved this girl! he loved her!—and his whole self responded with an inflow of fresh energy at the thought. A stranger from a strange, lost world!—but what of it?—he loved her!... The message from the lips and fingers of the girl broke in upon the thoughts that were crying for expression.

"You think of me." She smiled with her lips and eyes. "I am glad that you do, my dear one, but it is

hopeless.

"Listen: I have promised; Luhra has spoken: I will go with Horab to do as he wills. I will go freely, and he will leave you here unharmed. He promises me this.

"I will go with Horab far across the blue water that surrounds us here. It is an island, as you know, for have you not come here from afar?" Garry broke in with a startled exclamation. An island! Water! He closed his lips upon the denial of her words.

"And you," Luhra continued unheeding, "when we have gone, will return to your own land.

"But, oh, my dear one, remember always I love you. I have read your thoughts, oh bravest and tenderest of men; I loved you from the moment when my eyes opened and found you waiting there. I am telling you now, for I will never see you again." She broke in upon the wild urge of protest that filled his mind.

With an imperious gesture she motioned Horab to discard his spear, and she placed hers beside it on the

rocky floor. But she flinched and retreated from the outstretched arms and grasping hands, while Garry Connell struggled in insane frenzy at the cords that bound his wrists.

He felt the lean hands of Horab upon him, and the long arms held him in a crushing grip. And he saw the black face laugh evilly at the watching girl as Horab kicked the spears over beside the casket where she had been.

Garry felt himself raised in air, and he was as helpless as a child in that grasp. An instant later he was thrown heavily, to lie bruised and breathless in the metal box where first he had seen Luhra's face in wide-eyed awakening.

The rasping voice of Horab rose high and shrill. He was shouting triumphantly at the girl, while his hands worked to bind Garry's feet. Luhra's head and shoulders showed above the casket edge as she circled swiftly to approach from the opposite side and reach a trembling hand that would make the contact necessary for thought transference. Her cool touch

was upon him; Garry ceased his futile struggle while her words came, brokenly to his mind.

"Horab has tricked us," she cried; "he is leaving you here. He will paralyze you with the devil song of the bell, but not to sleep as I did: it will stop on another note. He says you will be always awake, but helpless—thinking—thinking—always!"

She buried her face in her hands to hide from his gaze the horror that was in her eyes. Garry Connell's straining hands went limp. The terror in the girl's voice struck through his own wild medley of thoughts to make him shudder with realization of the truth.

The threat was real! If Horab left the cave and took Luhra with him, the two would die in the desert. The black savage would never dare to face the strange, new world. And he, Garry, would be here in this cave, in this very coffin, held in a waking death. No one knew he was here; only by chance would the cave be investigated. And when someone finally came!

Garry stared in fascination at the green light. He

knew with terrible certainty that whatever help might come would come too late. To lie there hour after hour, for days and then for years—waiting!—always waiting!... And he could never still his thoughts.... He had a sickening realization of the thing they would find. A body!—his body!—and the mind within it utterly insane....

The sound of the shrieking bell was in his ears, and his nerves were trembling in response. He saw long arms above the casket, tearing away the figure of a struggling girl.... And then he knew he was alone....

The sound of the bell rose to the piercing, nerve-shredding scream he had heard before. He must think fast—and act!—but the numbness of brain and muscle was creeping upon him. He tried to call out, but his throat was tight, and would not respond. The echoes died into silence; the vibrations, as before, passed beyond audible range. He was sinking ... sinking....

Dimly he felt the casket shaking beneath him. In some distant corner of his mind he knew that the earthquake shocks had turned. Then he heard with

ear-splitting plainness the shrieking discord as the tremor shook the vibrating machine to silence.

The room was quiet; the paralysis left him; and in the instant of his release the clear brain of Garry Connell flashed from chaos to lay before him a full-formed plan.

"Luhra!" he called in the silent room. "Luhra!" But it seemed an age before he heard Horab and his captive returning from the passage. Then the touch of her hand gave him courage to continue.

"Yes?" she whispered; "yes, my dear one?"

He saw the shoulders of the black as he half-raised a spear threateningly toward the girl, then turned to adjust the whirring machine.

"Tell him," shouted Garry, "—tell Horab to shut off that damnable machine!" The shriek of it was rising again to drown his voice. "Tell him his life depends upon it. Tell him to listen to what I say or he will die."

He heard the girl's voice raised in a high-pitched call, and he heard the rasping snarl of Horab in reply. The girl repeated her cry above the echoing clamor of the bell—and the intolerable, rising scream, after a time, was stilled.

Garry experienced one raging moment when he would have given his hope of life for the ability to talk to Horab face to face and in words that could penetrate the black one's brain. But he could not. He must use this girl as an interpreter, and he must give her words to say that would make this ugly beast pause. He must speak as she would speak; put words and sentences into her mouth that would reach the savage superstitions of the other.

He spoke slowly, and stared impressively into the dark, fear-filled eyes in the white face that bent above him. He must make the girl believe.

"Horab works magic," he told her. "Tell Horab that I, too, am a magician—a great magician—a greater one than Horab."

He waited an instant to hear the girl's words and the disdainful laughter from lips in a savage face thrust close to where he lay.

"Horab is truly a magician," said Luhra doubtfully; "he laughs at your magic. Horab's *Tao* is a strong *Tao*, wicked and powerful."

"His *Tao*?" said Garry, and looked at the girl questioningly. He got the thought in her mind. "Oh, yes—his god, or devil."

He turned his head to stare straight into the grinning face whose wide, thin lips were twisted into a leering snarl. Garry had to summon all his power of will to hold the look that he gave his enemy and to laugh, in his turn, long and contemptuously. Another tremor shook the casket where he lay.

"Tell Horab," he ordered, while his eyes stared steadily into those of the savage king, "—tell Horab my *Tao* is stronger than his. My *Tao* is angry because I have been harmed; he is shaking the mountain. He will shake it down on Horab and crush out his life."

He continued to stare while he heard Luhra's voice, high with hope, and he saw a change of expression flicker across the black face, though Horab shouted a vehement reply.

Luhra was speaking to him. "Horab says the earth has shaken before; that it is not your *Tao* who shakes it. He asks for another sign."

Garry was not surprised. He had fired this shot at random; the tremor itself had suggested it. And now—

"Another sign!" Garry had to fight hard for self-control to keep from shouting the truth to this evil thing—to keep from telling him of the time that had passed, and of the world that was waiting for him. But that would never do: he must play upon this black one's superstitions. Let Horab once leave this cave with that devilish, soundless scream ringing in his ears and he, Garry Connell, was lost. And Luhra!—what hope for her out there?... The black hands were moving impatiently toward the machine....

Garry found himself speaking slowly—short sentences

that Luhra quickly repeated. And something within him rose to frame words such as Garry Connell, man of the desert, would never have thought to speak—phrases that best might reach a savage, vicious mind.

He glanced once at the watch on his wrist. He did not feel the torture of the tight gold cord. He was thinking in terms of daylight, and of how much time had passed since he had seen the sun....

"Horab shall have a sign—a terrible sign," he said.

"Death waits for Horab in the world outside, my *Tao* tells me. Horab shall die horribly. I see him choking in the hot sand. His tongue fills his mouth. The hot sun burns, and he is filled with fire. He tries to scream—to call upon his *Tao*—but he makes no sound.... And so shall Horab die."

The girl translated swiftly; the answer was a wild cry of rage from the black. He sprang beside the helpless man and his spear was raised high.

Garry felt the weight of Luhra's body thrown protectingly across him, and looked up to see murder

in the savage, slitted eyes. "Tell Horab," he directed sharply, "that if he harms you or me the burning death is his! But—" He waited deliberately after Luhra had spoken, and he saw plainly the flicker of fear in the ugly face. Now was the time.

"Unbind my feet!" he ordered, and he put into his voice all the force and menace he could muster. "Take me to the outer world. Take your spear. If I do not speak truth, kill me there. My *Tao* will show you a sign; he will fill your heart with fear as it now is filled with evil. But, it may be I can save you. Unbind my feet! Be quick!"

Again he waited while Luhra spoke, and he cursed silently with the agony of waiting. To be playing a part, speaking these absurdly childish things, when what he wanted was his hand upon a gun or in a grip of death about that black throat! Yet he lay as still as if the vibrations of the bell were upon him, and his eyes held unwaveringly upon the savage face, until he felt the fumbling of hands about his feet....

A square-cut portal!—and beyond it a golden sun that

shone through mists of purple and rose! Was he too late? Garry pressed forward in what would have been a clumsy run, but for the spear that had prodded him through all the long passage, and that warned now against attempted escape.

The brilliance and heat that struck him when he stepped, out into the open brought Garry in a flash from the world of horror and make-believe into the world he knew. He wanted to shout for sheer joy; but more than all else he wanted to leap at the ugly thing who stood blinking his eyes in the mouth of the cave.

The thought of escape was strong upon him, but the touch of a timid hand showed the folly of that. Luhra was beside him, her filmy lacework shining softly in the sun, to make more lovely the delicate flush beneath. Her eyes, shielded from the sun, were upon him with a look half hopeful, half despairing. No, he must see it through—go on with his play-acting—meet magic with magic. Horab had come out from the cave, and spear in hand he stood commandingly above them on a huge boulder. Yes, the magic must go on.

The harsh voice of the savage ripped out unintelligible words. Luhra translated. "It is changed," she said, "and Horab fears. But the water is there, and there is no burning death.... He says your *Tao* is weak."

Garry stared with thankful eyes across the blue expanse where a line of white marked ghostly breakers on a distant shore; where hills were reflected in the shimmering blue. But the sun was still above their tops, so he must spar for time—

"My *Tao* is strong," he said, and went on with whatever fantastic thoughts came into his mind. He was talking against time. He told of the new world his *Tao* had built, of men harnessing the lightning and flying through the air; of cannon that roared like the thunder and threw death and destruction upon those that the *Tao* would destroy.... And his eyes watched the slow descent of the dropping sun, while the figure above stirred impatiently and raised his spear.

"A sign!" Luhra was imploring. "He does not believe!"

The golden ball was touching now on a distant, purple peak. The amazing magic of the desert!—its moment had come! Garry indicated as best he could the phantom sea, so real, below.

"My *Tao* has spoken," he shouted: "watch! The waters shall be dried up; the seas shall become a desert of hot sand; the lands and waters that Horab knows shall be no more! There shall be no food for his stomach nor water for his lips where Horab wanders in torment.... Unless I save him."

He turned to stare at the vast mirage. He knew that the eyes of the others had followed his, and he knew that they saw the first change that crept over the land.

The blue that was so unmistakably a sea was dissolving; it seemed sucked into the sand. And, while yet the hot rays cast their lingering gold over mountain and plain, the seas faded and were gone ... and where they had been in unquestioned reality was only yellow sand that whirled hotly and drifted in the first breath of the coming night....

The towering figure above them stood rigid. Garry had found a sharp edge of rock, and sawed frantically upon it to cut the soft gold of the cords at his wrists. The one above them paid no heed; his eyes were held in horror of this silent death that swept across the world.

The hand that Garry extended was steady and cautious; his arm crept about the body of white and gold to draw the amazed and wondering girl silently into the open cave.

"Follow!" he ordered, and dashed headlong down the darkened way where an automatic was waiting for his eager fingers.

The pack was there, and he tore at it with frenzied hands to grip at the pistol within. And there was also an open chest whose contents glittered in the green light, and whose weight was not too great for him to carry....

He had both chest and gun when he returned. The stumbling falls in his mad rush had not served to allay

the hurts of his tortured body, nor still his raging fury. He called to Luhra as he ran—and realized that Luhra was gone. The chest fell forgotten at his feet as he rushed out; he shouted her name and cursed himself for leaving her.

Had the fascination of the outer world drawn her back? Had she trusted too greatly in the power of his Tao to shield her from harm? Connell could not know. He knew only that he saw her struggling in the grip of the long arms where the black one held her on an outthrust rock.

They were a hundred feet away, yet the black face beneath its pointed skull showed plainly its bestial fury as Garry sprang forward. With one motion the tall figure dashed the girl to the stone at his feet and raised his spear. He paused to laugh harshly at the man who rushed toward him—who could never reach him to stop the fatal thrust.

A threat, it might have been, to hold the attacker off, or a murderous intent to end now and forever this one captive's life: Garry did not wait to learn. And the

hundred-foot distance that meant a hundred feet of safety to the savage was spanned by a stream of lead from a gun whose stabbing flashes cracked sharply upon the still air. The ringing clatter of a spear that fell among granite stones came thinly to Garry as he saw the black form of Horab, king of another day, spin dizzily from the rock on which he stood.

He had hit him—wounded him at least—and the firing of that wild fusillade might have emptied the magazine! Gary waited for nothing more, but gathered the limp body of the girl within his outstretched arms and carried her stumblingly across the welter of rocks on the boulder-strewn slope. Nor did he stop until he had gained the safety of open ground beyond the marks of the great slide.

The earth was shivering and weaving as he laid her down; a rock crashed sharply in the distance. Garry turned to retrace his steps and leap wildly from rock to rock toward the mouth of the cave in a granite cliff. And the metal chest was in his arms when he returned where Luhra waited.

The ground was alive with sickening motion, he was nauseated with earthquake sickness, but he gave thought only to his gun and the one cartridge that he found in the chamber. He steadied his arm upon a rock to take aim at a figure on a distant slope.

Horab had climbed back upon the rock. A lean figure and black, he was sharply outlined in the last rays of the setting sun; the target was clear beyond the pistol's sights. But the fingers of the grim-faced man refused to tighten upon the trigger.

Savage and cruel—a relic of a bygone age! He stood there, ludicrous and unreal in his stark black nakedness, his frayed robes of crimson whipping to tatters in the breeze. Yet he had forgotten his wounds—Horab was standing upright—and Garry's hand that held the pistol fell loosely at his side. The hate melted from his heart as he watched where Horab drew himself painfully erect.

A barbarous figure was Horab, and evil beyond redemption, yet there were not lacking the attributes of a king in the grotesque form whose head was still

held high. The sun made flashing brilliance of the jewels on that distorted head, while he stared with hopeless, savage eyes across the changed world where he could have no part. His *Tao* had failed him; his enemy had struck him down; and now—

The rock that had been a rest for Garry's arm was swaying, and to his ears came a rumble and groan. Sentinel Mountain, that had watched the ages pass, that had seen the oceans truly change to sand, protested again at this disturbance of its own long sleep.

Garry heard the coming of the masses from above; the crashing din was deadening to his ears. They were safe—and his eyes were upon a savage figure, black and tall, that stared and stared, silently, across a sea of yellow sand. He watched it, clear-cut, motionless—until it vanished beneath the roaring flood of rocks.

And close in his arms there pressed the soft body of a trembling girl who touched his face and whispered: "Your *Tao*, my brave one, is strong. Hold me closely

that he may count me as your friend."

His own whispered words, though differing somewhat, were a fervent echo of hers. He saw the rocky masses piled high where the mouth of a cave had been; and "Thank God!" Garry Connell said, "we got out of there in time!"

The casket of jewels lay neglected among the rocks: to-morrow would be time enough to salvage the wealth for which he had risked his life. He swept the girl into his arms, and the sun's last rays made golden splendor of his burden as he carried her across the broken stones.

His ranch showed far below him when he stopped, but the green of date palms had vanished under the last great sweep of rocks. Some few that remained made dark splotches among the shadows that were engulfing the world.

What did it matter? Miramar—"Beautiful Sea!" He laughed grimly at thought of how that sea had served him, but his eyes were tender in his tanned and blood-

stained face.

Miramar could be restored. And it would be less
lonely now....

74 Beyond the Vanishing Point by Ray Cummings

The tale of a golden atom—an astounding adventure in size.

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

Chapter 1: The Fragment of Quartz

It was shortly after noon of December 31, 1960, when the series of weird and startling events began which took me into the tiny world of an atom of gold, beyond the vanishing point, beyond the range of even the highest-powered electric-microscope. My name is George Randolph. I was, that momentous afternoon, assistant chemist for the Ajax International Dye Company, with main offices in New York City.

It was twelve-twenty when the local exchange call-sorter announced Alan's connection from Quebec.

"You, George? Look here, we've got to have you up here at once. Chateau Frontenac, Quebec. Will you come?"

I could see his face imaged in the little mirror on my desk; the anxiety, tenseness in his voice, was duplicated in his expression.

"Well—" I began.

"You must, George. Babs and I need you. See here—"

He tried at first to make it sound like an invitation for a New Year's Eve holiday. But I knew it was not that. Alan and Barbara Kent were my best friends. They were twins, eighteen years old. I felt that Alan would always be my best friend; but for Babs my hopes, longings, went far deeper, though as yet I had never brought myself to the point of telling her so.

"I'd like to come, Alan. But—"

"You must! George, I can't tell you over the public air. It's—I've seen him! He's diabolical! I know it now!"

Him! It could only mean, of all the world, one person!

"He's here!" he went on. "Near here. We've seen him to-day! I didn't want to tell you, but that's why we came. It seemed a long chance, but it's he, I'm positive!"

I was staring at the image of Alan's eyes; it seemed that there was horror in them. And in his voice. "God, George, it's weird! Weird, I tell you. His looks—he—oh I can't tell you now! Only, come!"

I was busy at the office in spite of the holiday season, but I dropped everything and went. By one o'clock that afternoon I was wheeling my little sport midge from its cage on the roof of the Metropole building, and went into the air.

It was a cold gray afternoon with the feel of coming snow. I made a good two hundred and fifty miles at first, taking the northbound through-traffic lane

which to-day the meteorological conditions had placed at 6,200 feet altitude.

Flying is largely automatic. There was not enough traffic to bother me. The details of leaving the office so hastily had been too engrossing for thought of Alan and Babs. But now, in my little pit at the controls, my mind flung ahead. They had located him. That meant Franz Polter, for whom we had been searching nearly four years. And my memory went back into the past with vivid vision....

The Kents, four years ago, were living on Long Island. Alan and Babs were fourteen years old, and I was seventeen. Even then Babs represented to me all that was desirable in girlhood. I lived in a neighboring house that summer and saw them every day.

To my adolescent mind a thrilling mystery hung upon the Kent family. The mother was dead. Dr. Kent, father of Alan and Babs, maintained a luxurious home, with only a housekeeper and no other servant. Dr. Kent was a retired chemist. He had, in his home, a chemical laboratory in which he was working upon

some mysterious problem. His children did not know what it was, nor, of course, did I. And none of us had ever been in the laboratory, except that when occasion offered we stole surreptitious peeps.

I recall Dr. Kent as a kindly, iron-gray haired gentleman. He was stern with the discipline of his children; but he loved them, and was indulgent in a thousand ways. They loved him; and I, an orphan, began looking upon him almost as a father. I was interested in chemistry. He knew it, and did his best to help and encourage me in my studies.

There came an afternoon in the summer of 1956, when arriving at the Kent house, I ran upon a startling scene. The only other member of the household was a young fellow of twenty-five, named Franz Polter. He was a foreigner, born, I understood, in one of the Balkan Protectorates; and he was here, employed by Dr. Kent as laboratory assistant. He had been with the Kents, at this time, two years. Alan and Babs did not like him, nor did I. He must have been a clever, skilful chemist. No doubt he was. But in aspect he was, to us, repulsive. A hunchback, with a short

thick body; dangling arms that suggested a gorilla; barrel chest; a lump set askew on his left shoulder, and his massive head planted down with almost no neck. His face was rugged in feature; a wide mouth, a high-bridged heavy nose; and above the face a great shock of wavy black hair. It was an intelligent face; in itself, not repulsive.

But I think we all three feared Franz Polter. There was always something sinister about him, quite apart from his deformity.

I came, that afternoon, upon Babs and Polter under a tree on the Kent lawn. Babs, at fourteen with her long black braids down her back, bare-legged and short-skirted in a summer sport costume, was standing against the tree with Polter facing her. They were about of a height. To my youthful imaginative mind rose the fleeting picture of a young girl in a forest menaced by a gorilla.

I came upon them suddenly. I heard Polter say:

"But I lof you, And you are almos' a woman. Some day

you lof me."

He put out his thick hand and gripped her shoulder. She tried to twist away. She was frightened, but she laughed.

"You—you're crazy!"

He was suddenly holding her in his arms, and she was fighting him. I dashed forward. Babs was always a spunky sort of girl. In spite of her fear now, she kept on laughing, and she shouted:

"You—let me go, you—hunchback!"

He did let her go; but in a frenzy of rage he hauled back his hand and struck her in the face. I was upon him the next second. I had him down on the lawn, punching him; but though at seventeen I was a reasonably husky lad, the hunchback with his thick, hairy gorilla arms proved much stronger. He heaved me off. And then the commotion brought Alan.

Without waiting to find out what the trouble was, he jumped on Polter. Between us, I think we would have

beaten him pretty badly. But the housekeeper summoned Dr. Kent and the fight was over.

Polter left for good within an hour. He did not speak to any of us. But I saw him as he put his luggage into the taxi which Dr. Kent had summoned. I was standing silently nearby with Babs and Alan. The look he flung us as he drove away carried an unmistakable menace—the promise of vengeance. And I think now that in his warped and twisted mind he was telling himself that he would some day make Babs regret that she had laughed at his love.

What happened that night none of us ever knew. Dr. Kent worked late in his laboratory; he was there when Alan and Babs and the housekeeper went to bed. He had written a note to Alan; it was found on his desk in a corner of the laboratory next morning, addressed in care of the family lawyer to be given Alan in the event his father died. It said very little. Described a tiny fragment of gold quartz rock the size of a walnut which would be found under the giant microscope in the laboratory; and told Alan to give it to the American Scientific Society to be guarded and

watched very carefully.

This note was found, but Dr. Kent had vanished! There had been a midnight marauder. The laboratory was on the lower floor of the house. Through one of its open windows, so the police said, an intruder had entered. There was evidence of a struggle, but it must have been short, and neither Babs, Alan, the housekeeper nor any of the neighbors heard anything amiss. And the fragment of golden quartz was gone!

The police investigation came to nothing. Polter was found in New York. He withstood the police questions. There was nothing except suspicion upon which he could be held, and he was finally released. Immediately, he disappeared.

Neither Alan, Babs nor I saw Polter again. Dr. Kent had never been heard from to this day, four years later when I flew to join the twins in Quebec. And now Alan had told me that Polter was up there! We had never ceased to believe that Dr. Kent was alive, and that Polter was the midnight marauder. And as we grew older, we began to search for Polter. It seemed

to us that now we were older, if we could once get our hands on him, we could drag from him the truth in which the police had failed.

The call of a traffic director in mid-Vermont brought me back from these vivid thoughts. My buzzer was clanging; a peremptory halting-signal day-beam came darting up at me from below. It caught me and clung: I shouted down at it.

"What's the matter?" I gave my name and number and all the details in a breath. Above everything I had no wish to be halted now. "What's the matter? I haven't done anything wrong."

"The hell you haven't," the director roared. "Come down to three thousand. That lane's barred."

I dove obediently and his beam followed me. "Once more like that, young fellow—" But he went busy with somebody else and I didn't hear the end of his threat.

I crossed into Maine in mid-afternoon. Twilight was upon me. The sky was solid lead. The landscape all up

through here was gray-white with snow in the gathering darkness. I passed the city of Jackman, crossing full over it to take no chances of annoying the border officials; and a few miles further, I dropped to the glaring lights of the International Inspection Field. The formalities were soon finished. I was ready to take-away when Alan rushed at me.

"George! I thought I could connect here." He gripped me. He was wild-eyed, incoherent. He waved his taxiplane away. "I'm going back with my friend. George. I can't—I don't know what's happened to her. She's gone, now!"

"Who's gone? Babs?"

"Yes." He pushed me into my plane and climbed in after me. "Don't talk. Get us up! I'll tell you then. I shouldn't have left."

When we were up in the air, I swung on him. "What are you talking about? Babs gone?"

I could feel myself shuddering with a nameless horror.

"I don't know what I'm talking about, George. I'm about crazy. The Quebec police think I am, anyway. I been raising hell with them for an hour. Babs is gone. I can't find her. I don't know where she is."

He finally calmed down enough to tell me. Shortly after his radiophone to me in New York, he had missed Babs. They had had lunch in the huge hotel and then walked on the Dufferin Terrace—the famous promenade outside looking down over the lower city, the great sweep of the St. Lawrence River and the gray-white distant Laurentian mountains.

"I was to meet her inside. I went in ahead of her. But she didn't come. I went back to the terrace and she was gone. Wasn't in our rooms. Nor the lobby—nor anywhere."

But it was early afternoon, in the public place of a civilized city. In the daylight of the Dufferin Terrace, beside the long ice toboggan slide, under the gaze of skaters on the ice-rink and several hundred holiday merrymakers, a young girl could hardly be murdered, or forcibly abducted, without attracting some

attention! The Quebec police thought the young American unduly excited over his sister, who was missing only an hour. They would do what they could, if by dark she had not rejoined him. They suggested that doubtless the young lady had gone shopping.

"Maybe she did," I agreed. But in my heart, I felt differently. "She'll be waiting for us in the hotel when we get there, Alan."

"But I'm telling you we saw Polter this morning. He lives here—not thirty miles from Quebec. We saw him on the terrace after breakfast. Recognized him at once."

"Did he see you?"

"I don't know. He was lost in the crowd in a minute. But I asked a young French fellow who it was. He knew him. Told me, Frank Raskor. That's the name he wears now. He's a famous man up here—well known, immensely rich. I don't know if he saw us or not. What a fool I was to leave Babs alone, even for a minute!"

We were speeding over a white-clad valley with a little frozen river winding down its middle. Almost full night had come. The leaden sky was low above us. It began snowing. The lights of the small villages along the river were barely visible.

"Can you land us, Alan?"

"Yes, surely. Municipal field just beyond the Citadel. We can get to the hotel in five minutes. Good landing lights."

It was a flight of only half an hour. During it, Alan told me about Polter. The hunchback, known now as Frank Rascor, owned a mine in the Laurentides, some thirty miles from Quebec City—a fabulously productive mine of gold. It was an anomaly that gold should be produced in this region. No vein of gold-bearing rock had been found, except the one on Polter's property. Alan had seen a newspaper account of the strangeness of it; and just upon the chance had come to Quebec, seen Frank Rascor on the Dufferin Terrace, and recognized him as Polter.

Again my thoughts went back into the past. Had Polter stolen that missing fragment of golden quartz the size of a walnut which had been beneath Dr. Kent's microscope? We always thought so. Dr. Kent had some secret, some great problem upon which he was working. Polter, his assistant, had evidently known, or partially known, its details. And now, four years later, Polter was immensely rich, with a "gold mine" in mountains where there was no other such evidence of gold!

I seemed to see some connection. Alan, I knew, was groping with a dim idea, so strange he hardly dared voice it.

"I tell you, it's weird, George. The sight of him. Polter—heavens, one couldn't mistake that hunchback—and his face, his features, just the same as when we knew him."

"Then what's weird?? I demanded.

"His age." There was a queer solemn hush in Alan's voice. "George, when we knew Polter, he was about

twenty-five, wasn't he? Well, that was four years ago. But he isn't twenty-nine now! I swear it's the same man—but he isn't around thirty. Don't ask me what I'm talking about. I don't know. But he isn't thirty. He's nearer fifty! Unnatural! Weird! I felt it, and so did Babs, just that brief look we had at him."

I did not answer. My attention was on managing the plane. The lights of Sevis were under us. Beyond the city cliffs the St. Lawrence lay in its deep valley; and the Quebec lights, the light-dotted ramparts with the terrace and the great fortress-like hotel showed across the river.

"Better take the stick, Alan. I don't know where the field is. And don't you worry about Babs. She'll be back by now."

But she was not. We went to the two connecting rooms in the tower of the hotel which Alan and Babs had engaged. We inquired with half a dozen phone-calls. No one had seen or heard from her. The Quebec police were sending a man up to talk to Alan.

"Well, we won't be here," Alan called to me. He was standing by the window in Bab's room; he was trembling too much to use the phone. I hung up the receiver and went through the connecting door to join him.

Bab's room! It sent a pang through me. A few of her garments were lying around. A negligee was laid out on the dainty little bed. A velvet boudoir doll—she had always loved them—stood on the dresser. Upon this hotel room, in a day, she had impressed her personality. Her perfume was in the air. And now she was gone.

"We won't be here," Alan was repeating. He gripped me at the window. "Look!" In his hand was an ugly-looking, smokeless, soundless automatic of the Essen type. "And I've got another, for you. Brought them up with me."

His face was white and drawn, but his hands abruptly were steady. The tremble was gone out of his voice.

"I'm going after him. George! Now! Understand that?"

Now! His place is only thirty miles from here, out there in the mountains. You can see it in the daylight—a wall around his property and a stone castle which he built in the middle of it. A gold mine? Hell!"

There was nothing to be seen now out of the window but the snow-filled darkness, the blurred lights of lower Quebec and the line of dock-lights five hundred feet under us.

"Will you fly me, George?"

"Of course."

I was the one trembling now; the cool feel of the automatic which Alan thrust into my hand seemed suddenly to crystallize Bab's danger. I was here in her room, with the scent of her perfume around it, and this deadly weapon was needed! But the trembling was gone in a moment.

"Yes. Of course, Alan. No use talking to the police. You can't get a search warrant to ransack the castle of a rich man just because you can't find your sister. Come

on. You can tell me what his place is like as we go."

Bundled in our flying suits we hurried from the hotel, climbed the Citadel slope of the landing field, and in ten minutes were again in the air. The wind sucked at us. The snow now was falling with thick huge flakes. Directed by Alan, I headed out over the ice-filled St. Lawrence, past the frozen Isle d'Orleans, toward Polter's mysterious mountain castle.

Suddenly Alan burst out, "I know what father's secret was, George! I can piece it together now, from little things that were meaningless when I was a kid. He invented the electro-microscope. You know that. The infinitely small fascinated him. I remember he once said that if we could see far enough down into smallness, we would come upon human life!"

Alan's low tense voice was more vehement than I had ever heard it before. "It's clear to me now, George. That little fragment of golden quartz which he wanted me to be so careful of contained a world with human inhabitants! Father knew it, or suspected it. And I think the chemical problem on which he was working

aimed for some drug. I know it was a drug they were compounding. Polter said so once, a radio-active drug; I remember listening at the door. A drug, George, capable of making a human being infinitely small!"

I did not answer when momentarily Alan paused. So strange a thing! My mind whirled with it; struggled to encompass it. And like the meaningless pieces of a puzzle, dropping so easily into place when the key-piece is fitted. I saw Polter stealing that fragment of gold; abducting Dr. Kent—perhaps because Polter himself was not fully acquainted with the secret. And now, Polter, up here with a fabulously rich "gold mine." And Babs, abducted by him, to be taken—where?

It set me shuddering.

"Alan!"

"That's what it was!" Alan reiterated. "And Polter, here now with what he calls a 'mine.' It isn't a mine, it's a laboratory! He's got father, too, hidden God

knows where! And now Babs. We've got to get them.
George! The police can't help us! It's just you and me,
to fight this thing. And it's diabolical!"

Chapter 2: The Girl an Inch Tall

We soared over the divided channel of the St. Lawrence, between Orleans and the mainland. Montmorency Falls in a moment showed dimly white through the murk to our left, a great hanging veil of ice higher than Niagara. Further ahead, the lights of the little village of St. Anne de Beaupré were visible with the gray-black, towering hills behind them. Historic region! But Alan and I had no thoughts for it.

"Swing left, George. Over the mainland. That's St. Anne; we pass this side of it. Put the mufflers on. This damn thing roars like a tower siren."

I cut in the mufflers, and switched off our wing-lights. It was illegal, but we were past all thought of that. We were both desperate; the slow prudent process of acting within the law had nothing to do with this affair. We both knew it.

Our little plane was dark, and amid the sounds of this night blizzard our muffled engine could not be heard.

Alan touched me. "There are his lights; see them?"

We had passed St. Anne. The hills lay ahead—wild mountainous country stretching northward to the foot of Hudson Bay. The blizzard was roaring out of the north and we were heading into it. I saw, on what seemed a dome-like hill perhaps a thousand feet above the river level, a small cluster of lights which marked Polter's property.

"Fly over it once, George. Low—we can chance it. And find a place to land outside the walls."

We presently had it under us. I held us at five hundred feet, and cut our speed to the minimum of twenty miles an hour facing the gale, though it was sixty or seventy when we turned. There were a score or two of hooded ground lights. But there was little reflection aloft, and in the murk of the snowfall I felt we would escape notice.

We crossed, turned and went back in an arc following Polter's outer curved wall. We had a good view of it. A weird enough looking place, here on its lonely hilltop.

No wonder the wealthy "Frank Rascor" had attained local prominence!

The whole property was irregularly circular, perhaps a mile in diameter covering the almost flat dome of the hilltop. Around it, completely enclosing it, Polter had built a stone and brick wall. A miniature wall of China! We could see that it was fully thirty feet high with what evidently were naked high-voltage wires protecting its top. There were half a dozen little gates, securely barred, with doubtless a guard at each of them.

Within the wall there were several buildings: a few small stone houses suggesting workmen's dwellings; an oblong stone structure with smoke funnels which seemed perhaps a smelter; a huge, dome-like spread of translucent glass over what might have been the top of a mine-shaft. It looked more like the dome of an observatory—an inverted bowl fully a hundred feet wide and equally as high, set upon the ground. What did it cover?

And, there was Polter's residence—a castle-like brick

and stone building with a central tower not unlike a miniature of the Chateau Frontenac. We saw a stone corridor on the ground connecting the lower floor of the castle with the dome, which lay about a hundred feet to one side.

Could we chance landing inside the wall? There was a dark, level expanse of snow where we could have done it, but our descending plane would doubtless have been discovered. But the mile-wide inner area was dark in many places. Spots of light were at the little wall-gates. There was a glow all along the top of the wall. Lights were in Polter's house; they slanted out in yellow shafts to the nearby white ground. But for the rest, the whole place was dark, save a dim glow from under the dome.

I shook my head at Alan's suggestion. "We couldn't land inside." We had circled back and were a mile or so off toward the river. "You saw guards down there. But that low stretch outside the gate on this side—"

A plan was coming to me. Heaven knows it was desperate enough, but we had no alternative. We

would land and accost one of the gate guards. Force our way in. Once inside the wall, on foot in the darkness of this blizzard, we could hide; creep up to that dome. Beyond that my imagination could not go.

We landed in the snow a quarter of a mile from one of the gates. We left the plane and plunged into the darkness. It was a steady upward slope. A packed snowfield was under foot, firm enough to hold our shoes, with a foot or so of loose soft snow on its top. The falling flakes whirled around us. The darkness was solid, Our helmeted leather-furred flying suits were soon shapeless with a gathering white shroud. We carried our Essens in our gloved hands. The night was cold, around zero I imagine, though with that biting wind it felt far colder.

From the gloom a tiny spot of light loomed up.

"There it is, Alan. Easy now! Let me go first." The wind tore away my words. We could see the narrow rectangle of bars at the gate, with a glow of light behind them.

"Hide your gun, Alan." I gripped him. "Hear me?"

"Yes."

"Let me go first. I'll do the talking. When he opens the gate, let me handle him. You—if there are two of them—you take the other."

We emerged from the darkness, into the glow of light by the gate. I had the horrible feeling that a shot would greet us. A challenge came, at first in French, then in English.

"Stop! What do you want?"

"To see Mr. Rascor."

We were up to the bars now, shapeless hooded bundles of snow and frost. A man stood in the doorway of a lighted little cubby behind the bars. A black muzzle in his hand was leveled at us.

"He sees no one. Who are you?"

Alan was pressing at me from behind. I shoved back, and took a step forward. I touched the bars.

"My name is Fred Davis. Newspaper man from Montreal. I must see Mr. Rascor."

"You cannot. You may send in your call. The mouthpiece is there—out there to the left. Bare your face; he talks to no one without the face image."

The guard had drawn back into his cubby; there was only this extended hand and the muzzle of his weapon left visible.

I took a step forward. "I don't want to talk by phone. Won't you open the gate? It's cold out here. We have important business. We'll wait with you."

Abruptly the gate lattice slid aside. Beyond the cubby doorway was the open darkness within the wall. A scuffed path leading inward from the gate showed for a few feet.

I walked over the threshold, with Alan crowding me.

The Essen in my coat pocket was leveled. But from the cubby doorway, I saw that the guard was gone! Then I saw him crouching back of a metal shield. His voice rang out.

"Stand!"

A light struck my face—a little beam from a television sender beside me. It all happened in an instant, so quickly Alan and I had barely time to make a move. I realized my image was now doubtless being presented to Polter. He would recognize me!

I ducked my head, yelling: "Don't do that! You frighten me!"

It was too late! The guard had received a signal. I was aware of its buzz.

From the shield a tiny jet of fluid leaped at me. It struck my hood. There was a heavy, sickening-sweet smell. It seemed like chloroform. I felt my senses going. The cubby room was turning dark; was roaring.

I think I fired at the shield. And Alan leapt aside. I heard the faint hiss of his Essen. And his choked, horrified voice:

"George—come back! Run! Don't fall! Don't!"

I crumpled; slid into blackness. And it seemed, as I went down, that Alan's inert body was falling on top of me....

I recovered consciousness after a nameless interval, a phantasmagoria of wild, drugged dreams. My senses came slowly. At first, there were dim muffled voices and the tread of footsteps. Then I knew that I was lying on the ground, and that I was indoors. It was warm. My overcoat was off. Then I realized that I was bound and gagged.

I opened my eyes. Alan was lying inert beside me, roped and with a black gag around his face and in his mouth. We were in a huge dim open space. Presently, as my vision cleared, I saw that the dome was overhead. This was a circular, hundred-foot-wide room. It was dimly lighted. The figures of men were

moving about, their great misshapen shadows shifting with them. Twenty feet from me there was a pile of golden rock—chunks of gold the size of a man's fist, or his head, and larger, heaped loosely into a mound ten feet high.

Beyond this pile of ore, near the center of the room, twenty feet above the concrete floor, there was a large hanging electrolier. It cast a circular glow downward. Under it I saw a low platform raised a foot or two above the ground. A giant electro-microscope was hung with its twenty-foot cylinder above the platform. Its intensification tubes were glowing in a dim phosphorescent row on a nearby bracket. A man sat in a chair on the platform at the microscope's eyepiece.

I saw all this with a brief glance, then my attention went to a white stone slab under the giant lense. It rested on the platform floor, a two-foot-square surface of smooth white stone like marble. A little roped railing a few inches high fenced it. And in its center lay a fragment of golden quartz the size of a walnut!

There was a movement across my line of vision. Two figures advanced. I recognized both of them. And I strained at my bonds; mouthed the gag with futile, horrified effort. I could no more than writhe; and I could not make a sound. I lay, after a moment exhausted, and stared with horror.

The familiar hunched figure of Polter advanced toward the microscope. And with him, his huge hand holding her wrists, was Babs. They were nearly fifty feet from me, but with the light over them I could see them clearly. Bab's slim figure was clad in a long skirted dress—pale blue, now, with the light on it. Her long black hair had fallen disheveled to her shoulders. I could not see her face. She did not cry out. Polter was half dragging her as she resisted him; and then abruptly she ceased struggling.

I heard his guttural voice. "That iss better."

They mounted to the platform. It seemed to me that they must have been far away; they were very small. Abnormally small. I blinked. Horror surged over me. Their figures were dwindling as they stood there!

Polter was saying something to the man at the microscope. Other men were nearby, watching. All normal, save Polter and Babs. A moment passed. Polter was standing by the chair in which the man at the microscope was sitting. And Polter's head barely reached its seat! Babs was clinging to him, now. Another moment. They were both little figures down by the chair-leg. Then they began walking with swaying steps toward the tiny railing of the white slab. The white reflection from the slab plainly illumined then. Polter's arm was around Babs. I had not realized how small they were until I saw Polter lift the rope of the four-inch little fence, and he and Babs stooped and walked under it. The fragment of quartz lay a foot from them in the center of the white surface. They walked unsteadily toward it. But soon they were running.

My horrified senses whirled. Then abruptly I felt something touch my face! Alan and I were lying in shadow. No one had noticed my writhing movements, and Alan was still in drugged unconsciousness. Something tiny and light and soundless as a butterfly

wing brushed my face! I jerked my head aside. On the floor, within six inches of my eyes, I saw the tiny figure of a girl an inch high! She stood, with a warning gesture to her lips—a human girl in a filmy flowing drapery. Long pale golden tresses lay on her white shoulders; her face, small as my little fingernail, colorful as a miniature painted upon ivory, was so close to my eyes that I could see her expression—warning me not to move.

There was a faint glow of light on the floor where she stood, but in a moment she moved out of it. Then I felt her brush against the back of my head. My ear was near the ground. A tiny warm hand touched my earlobe; clung to it. A tiny voice sounded in my ear.

"Please do not move your head! You might kill me!"

There was a pause. I held myself rigid. Then the tiny voice came again.

"I am Glora, a friend. I have the drug! I will help you!"

Chapter 3: The Fight in the Shrinking Dome Room

It seemed that Alan was stirring. I felt the tiny hand leave my ear. I thought that I could hear faint little footfalls as the girl scampered away, fearful that a sudden movement from Alan would crush her. I turned cautiously after a moment and saw Alan's eyes upon me. He too had seen, with a blurred returning consciousness, the dwindling figures of Babs and Polter. I followed his gaze. The white slab with the golden quartz under the microscope seemed empty of human movement. The several men in this huge circular dome-room were dispersing to their affairs: three of them sat whispering by what I now saw was a pile of gold ingots stacked crosswise. But the fellow at the microscope held his place, his eye glued to its aperture as he watched the vanishing figures of Polter and Babs on the rock-fragment.

Alan seemed trying to convey something to me, He could only gaze and jerk his head. I saw behind his head the figure of the tiny girl on the floor behind him. She wanted evidently to approach his head but did not dare. When for an instant he was quiet, she

ran forward, but at once scampered back.

From the group by the ingots, one of the men rose and came toward us. Alan held still, watching. And the girl, Glora, seized the opportunity to come nearer. We both heard her tiny voice:

"Do not move! Close your eyes! Make him think you are still unconscious."

Then she was gone, like a mouse hiding in the shadows near us.

Amazement swept Alan's face; he twisted, mouthed at his gag. But he saw my eager nod and took his cue from me.

I closed my eyes and lay stiff, breathing slowly. Footsteps approached. A man bent over Alan and me.

"Are you no conscious yet?" It was the voice of a foreigner, with a queer, indescribable intonation. A foot prodded us. "Wake up!"

Then the footsteps retreated, and when I dared to look the man was rejoining his fellows. It was a strange-looking trio. They were heavy-set men in leather jackets and short, wide knee-length trousers. One wore tight, high boots, and the others a sort of white buskin, with ankle straps. All were bareheaded—round, bullet heads of close-dipped black hair.

I suddenly had another startling realization. These men were not of normal size as I had assumed! They were eight or ten feet tall at the very least! And they and the pile of ingots, instead of being close to me, were more distant than I had thought.

Alan was trying to signal me. The tiny girl was again at his ear, whispering to him. And then she came to me.

"I have a knife. See?" She backed away. I caught the pin-point gleam of what might have been a knife in her hand. "I will get a little larger. I am too small to cut your ropes. You lie still, even after I have cut them."

I nodded. The movement frightened her so that she leaped backward; but she came again, smiling. The three men were talking earnestly by the ingots. No one else was near us.

Gloria's tiny voice was louder, so that we both could hear it at once.

"When I free you, do not move or they may see that you are loose. I get larger now—a little larger—and return."

She darted away and vanished. Alan and I lay listening to the voices of the three men. Two were talking in a strange tongue. One called to the man at the microscope, and he responded. The third man said suddenly:

"Say, talk English. You know damn well I can't understand that lingo."

"We say, McGuire, the two prisoners soon wake up."

"What we oughta do is kill 'em. Polter's a fool."

"The doctor say, wait for him return. Not long—what you call three, four hours."

"And have the Quebec police up here lookin' fer 'em? An' that damn girl he stole off the terrace—What did he call her, Barbara Kent?"

"These two who are drugged, their bodies can be thrown in a gully down behind St. Anne. That what the doctor plan to do, I think. Then the police find them—days maybe from now—and their smashed airship with them."

Gruesome suggestion!

The man at the microscope called, "They are gone. Almost. I can hardly see them more." He left the platform and joined the others. And I saw that he was much smaller than they—about my own size possibly.

There seemed six men here altogether. Four now, by the ingots, and two others far across the room where I saw the dark entrance of the corridor-tunnel which led to Polter's castle.

Again I felt a warning hand touch my face, and saw the figure of Glora standing by my head. She was larger now—about a foot tall. She moved past my eyes; stood by my mouth; bent down over my gag. I felt the cautious side of a tiny knife-blade inserted under the fabric of the gag. She hacked, tugged at it, and in a moment ripped it through.

She stood panting from the effort. My heart was pounding with fear that she would be seen; but the man had turned the central light off when he left the microscope, and it was far darker here now than before.

I moistened my dry mouth. My tongue was thick, but I could talk.

"Thank you, Glora."

"Quiet!"

I felt her hacking at the ropes around my wrists. And then at my ankles. It took her a long time, but at last I was free! I rubbed my arms and legs; felt the

returning strength in them.

And presently Alan was free. "George, what—" he began.

"Wait!" I whispered. "Easy! Let her tell us what to do."

We were unarmed. Two, against these six, three of whom were giants.

Gloria whispered, "Do not move! I have the drugs. But I can no give them to you when I am still so small. I have not enough. I will hide—there." Her little arm gestured to where, near us, half a dozen boxes were piled. "When I am large as you, I come back. Be ready, quickly to act. I may be seen. I give you then the drug."

"But wait," Alan whispered. "We must know—"

"The drug to make you large. In a moment then you can fight these men. I had planned it for myself, to do that, and then I saw you held captive. That girl of your world the doctor just now steal, she is friend of

yours?

"Yes! Yes, Glora. But—" A thousand questions were springing in my mind, but this was no time to ask them. I amended, "Go! Hurry! Give us the drug when you can."

The little figure moved away from us and disappeared. Alan and I lay as we had before. But now we could whisper. We tried to anticipate what would happen; tried to plan, but that was futile. The thing was too strange, too astoundingly fantastic.

How long Glora was gone I do not know. I think, not over three or four minutes. She came from her hiding place, crouching this time, and joined us. She was, probably, of normal Earth size—a small, frail-looking girl something over five feet tall. We saw now that she was about sixteen years old. We lay staring at her, amazed at her beauty. Her small oval face was pale, with the flush of pink upon her cheeks—a face queerly, transcendently beautiful. It was wholly human, yet somehow unearthly, as though unmarked by even the heritage of our Earthly strifes.

"Now! I am ready." She was fumbling at her robe. "I will give you each the same."

Her gestures were rapid. She flung a quick glance at the distant men. Alan and I were tense. We could easily be discovered now, but we had to chance it. We were sitting erect. He murmured:

"But what do we do? What happens? What—"

On the palm of her hand were two small pink-white pellets. "Take these—one for each of you. Quickly!"

Involuntarily we drew back. The thing abruptly was gruesome, frightening. Horribly frightening.

"Quickly," she urged. "The drug is what you call highly radio-active. And volatile. Exposed to the air it is gone very soon. You are afraid? No! No, it will not harm you."

With a muttered curse at his own reluctance, Alan seized the pellet. I stopped him.

"Wait!"

The men momentarily were engaged in a low-voiced, earnest discussion. I dared to hesitate a moment longer.

"Gloria, where will you be?"

"Here. Right here. I will hide."

"We want to go after Mr. Polter." I gestured. "Into that little piece of golden rock. Is that where he went? Is that where he took the Earth girl?"

"Yes. My world is there—within an atom there in that rock."

"Will you take us?"

"Yes! Yes!"

Alan whispered suddenly, "Then let us go now. Get smaller, now."

But she shook her head vehemently. "That is not

possible. We would be seen as we climbed the platform and crossed the white slab."

"No." I protested. "Not if we get very small, hiding here first."

She was smiling, but urgently fearful of this delay. "Should we get that small, then it would be, from here"—she gestured toward the microscope—"to there, a journey of very many miles. Don't you understand?"

This thing so strange!

Alan was plucking at me. "Ready, George?"

"Yes."

I put the pellet on my tongue. It tasted slightly sweet, but seemed quickly melted and I swallowed it hastily. My head swam. My heart was pounding, but that was apprehension, not the drug. A thrill of heat ran through my veins as though my blood were on fire.

Alan was clinging to me as we sat together. Glora again had vanished. In the background of my whirling consciousness the sudden thought hovered that she had tricked us; done to us something diabolical. But the thought was swept away in the confusion of the flood of impressions upon me.

I turned dizzily. "All right, Alan?"

"Yes, I—I guess so."

My ears were roaring, the room seemed whirling, but in a moment that passed. I felt a sudden, growing sense of lightness. A humming was within me—a soundless tingle. To every tiny microscopic cell in my body the drug had gone. The myriad pores of my skin seemed thrilling with activity. I know now it was the exuding volatile gas of this disintegrating drug. Like an aura it enveloped me, acted upon my garments.

I learned later much of the principles of this and its companion drug. I had no thought for such things now. The huge dimly illumined room under the dome was swaying. Then abruptly it steadied. The strange

sensations within me were lessening, or I forgot them. And I became aware of externals.

The room was shrinking! As I stared, not with horror now, but with amazement and a coming triumph, I saw everywhere a slow, steady, crawling movement. The whole place was dwindling. The platform, the microscope, were nearer than before, and smaller. The pile of ingots, with the men off there, was shifting toward me.

"George! My God—weird!"

I saw Alan's white face as I turned to him. He was growing at the same rate as myself evidently, for of all the scene he only was unchanged.

We could feel the movement. The floor under us was shifting, crawling slowly. From all directions it came, contracting as though it were being squeezed beneath us. In reality our expanding bodies were pushing outward.

The pile of boxes which had been a few feet away,

were thrusting themselves at me I moved incautiously and knocked them over. They seemed small now, perhaps half their former size. Glora was standing behind them. I was sitting and she was standing, but across the litter, our faces were level.

"Stand up!" she murmured. "You all right now. I hide!"

I struggled to my feet, drawing Alan up with me. Now! The time for action was upon us! We had already been discovered. The men were shouting, clambering to their feet. Alan and I stood swaying. The dome-room had contracted to half its former size. Near us was a little platform, chair and microscope. Small figures of men were rushing at us.

I shouted, "Alan! Watch yourself!"

We were unarmed. These men might have automatics. But evidently they did not. Knives were in their hands. The whole place was ringing with shouts. And then a shrill siren alarm from outside was clanging.

The first of the men—a few moments before he had

seemed a giant—flung himself upon me. His head was lower than my shoulders. I met him with a blow of my fist in his face. He toppled backward; but from one side, another figure came at me. A knife-blade bit into the flesh of my thigh.

The pain seemed to fire my brain. A madness descended upon me. It was the madness of abnormality. I saw Alan with two dwarfed figures clinging to him. But he threw them off, and they turned and ran.

The man at my thigh stabbed again, but I caught his wrist and, as though he were a child, whirled him around me and flung him away. He landed with a crash against the shrunken pile of gold nuggets and lay still.

The place was in a turmoil. Other men were appearing from outside. But they stood now well away from us. Alan backed against me. His laugh rang out, half hysterical with the madness upon him as it was upon me.

"God! George, look at them! So small!"

They were now hardly the height of our knees. This was now a small, circular room, under a lowering concave dome. A shot came from the group of pigmy figures. I saw the small stab of flame, heard the sing of the bullet.

We rushed, with the full frenzy of madness upon us, enraged giants. What actually happened I can not recount. I recall scattering the little figures; seizing them; flinging them headlong. A bullet, tiny now, stung the calf of my leg. Little chairs and tables under my feet were crashing. Alan was lunging back and forth; stamping; flinging his tiny adversaries away. There were twenty or thirty of the figures here now. Then I saw some of them escaping.

The room was littered with wreckage. I saw that by some miracle of chance the microscope was still standing, and I had a moment of sanity.

"Alan, watch out! The microscope! The platform—don't smash it! And Glora! Look out for her!"

I suddenly became aware that my head and a shoulder had struck the dome roof. Why, this was a tiny room! Alan and I found ourselves backed together, panting in the small confines of a circular cubby with an arching dome close over us. At our feet the platform with the microscope over it hardly reached our boot-tops. There was a sudden silence, broken only by our heavy breathing. The tiny forms of humans strewn around us were all motionless. The others had fled.

Then we heard a small voice. "Here! Take this! Quickly! You are too large! Quickly!"

Alan took a step. And then a sudden panic was on us both. Glora was here at our feet. We did not dare turn; hardly dared move. To stoop might have crushed her. My leg hit the top of the microscope cylinder. It rocked but did not fall.

Where was Glora? In the gloom we could not see her. We were in a panic.

Alan began, "George, I say—"

The contracting inner curve of the dome bumped gently against my head. The panic of confusion which was upon us turned to fear. The room was closing in to crush us.

I muttered. "Alan! I'm going out!" I braced myself and heaved against the side and top curve of the dome. Its metal ribs and heavy translucent, reinforced glass plates resisted me. There was an instant when Alan and I were desperately frightened. We were trapped, to be crushed in here by our own horrible growth. Then the dome yielded under our smashing blows. The ribs bent; the plates cracked.

We straightened, pushed upward and emerged through the broken dome, with head and shoulders towering into the outside darkness and the wind and snow of the blizzard howling around us!

Chapter 4: The Journey Into Smallness

"Gloria, that—that was horrible."

We stood, again in normal size, with the wrecked dome-laboratory around us. The dome had a great jagged hole halfway up one of its sides, through which the snow was falling. The broken bodies strewn around were gruesome.

Alan repeated, "Horrible, Gloria. This drug, the power of it, is diabolical."

Gloria had grown large after us; had given us the companion drug. I need not detail the strange sensations of our dwindling. We were so soon to experience them again!

We had searched, when still large, all of Polter's grounds. Some of his men undoubtedly escaped, made off into the blizzard. How many, we never knew. None of them ever made themselves known again.

We were ready to start into the atom. The fragment of

golden quartz still lay under the microscope on the white square of stone slab. We had hurried with our last preparations. The room was chilling. We were all inadequately dressed for such cold.

I left a note scribbled on a square of paper by the microscope. With daylight, Polter's wrecked place would be discovered. The police would come.

"Guard this piece of golden quartz. Take it at once, very carefully, to the Royal Canadian Scientific Society. Have it watched day and night. We will return."

I signed it George Randolph. And as I did so, the extraordinary aspect of these events swept me anew. Here in Polter's weird place I had seemed living in some strange fantastic realm. But this was the Province of Quebec, in civilized Canada. These were the Quebec authorities I was addressing.

I flung the thoughts away. "Ready, Glora?"

"Yes."

Then doubts assailed me. None of Polter's men had gotten large to fight us. Evidently he did not trust them with the drug. We could well believe that, for the thing, misused, was diabolical beyond human conception. A single giant, a criminal, a madman, by the power of giant size alone, could devastate the earth! The drug, lost, or carelessly handled, could get loose. Animals, insects, eating it, could roam the earth, gigantic monsters! Vegetation, nourished with it, might in a day overrun a great city, burying it with a jungle growth!

How terrible a thing, if the realm of smallness were suddenly to emerge! Monsters of the sea, marine organisms, could expand until even the ocean was too small for them. Microbes of disease, feeding upon this drug—

Alan was gripping me. "We're ready, George."

"Yes. Yes, I'm ready."

This was not largeness we were facing now, but smallness. I thought of Babs, down there with Polter,

beyond the vanishing point in the realm of the infinitely small. They had been gone an hour at least. Every moment lost now was adding to Bab's danger.

"Yes. I'm ready, Alan."

Gloria sat with us on the platform. Strange little creature! She was wholly calm now; methodical with her last directions. There had been no time for her to tell us anything about herself. Alan had asked her why she had come here and how she had gotten the drugs. She waved him away:

"On the journey down. Plenty of time, then."

"How long?" Alan demanded.

"Not too long. If we are careful with managing the trip, what you might call ten hours."

And now as we were ready to start, she told us calmly:

"I will give you each your share of the drugs, but

them you take only as I tell you."

She produced from her robe several small vials a few inches long. They were tightly stoppered. The feel of them was cool and sleek; they seemed of some strange, polished metal. Some of them were tinted black while the others glowed opalescent. She gave each of us one vial of each kind.

"The light ones are for diminishing," she said. "We take them very carefully, one small pellet only at first."

Alan was opening one of his, but she checked him.

"Wait! The drug evaporates very quickly. I have more to say, first. We sit here together. Then you follow me to the white slab. We climb upon the little rock."

She laid her hands on our arms. Her blue eyes regarded us earnestly. Her manner was naive; childlike. But I could not mistake her intelligence; the force of character stamped on her face for all its dainty, ethereal beauty.

"Alan—" She smiled at him, and tossed back a straying lock of her hair which was annoying her. "You pay attention, Alan. You are very young, reckless. You listen. We must not be separated. You understand that, both of you? We will be always in that little piece of rock. But there will be miles of distance. And to be lost in size—"

Strange journey upon which now we were starting!
Lost in size?

"You understand me? Lost in size. If that happens, we might never find each other. And if we come upon the Doctor Polter and the girl he holds captive—if we can overtake them—"

"We must!" I exclaimed. "And we must start, Glora!"

"Yes. Now!"

She showed us which pellet to select. They were of several sizes, I found. And as she afterward told us, the larger ones were not only larger but of an intensified strength. We took the smallest. It was

barely a thousandth part of the strength of the largest. In unison we placed the pellets on our tongues, and hastily swallowed.

The first sensations were as before. And, familiar now, they caused no more than a fleeting discomfort. But I think I could never get used to the outward strangeness!

The room in a moment was expanding. I could feel the platform floor crawling outward beneath me, so that I had to hitch and change my position as it pulled. We were seated together, Alan and I on each side of Glora. My fingers were on her arm. It did not change size, but it slowly drew away with a space opening between us. Overhead, the dome-roof, the great jagged hole there, was receding, lifting, moving upward and away.

Glora pulled us to our feet. "We had better start now. The distance is so far, so quickly."

We had been sitting within five feet of the stone slab with its little four-inch-high railing around it. A chair

was by the microscope eyepiece. As we stood swaying I saw that the chair was huge, and its seat level with my head. The great barrel-cylinder of the microscope slanted sixty feet upward. The dome-roof was a distant spread three hundred feet up in the dimness. This gigantic room! It was a vast arena now.

Alan and I must have hesitated, confused by the expanding scene—a slow steady movement everywhere. Everything was drawing away from us. Even as we stood together, the creeping platform floor was separating us.

A moment passed. Glora was urging vehemently:

"Come! You must not stand!"

We started walking. The railing around the slab was knee-high. The slab itself was a broad square surface. The fragment of golden quartz lay in its center. It was now a jagged lump nearly a foot in diameter!

The platform seemed shifting as we walked; the railing hardly came closer as we advanced toward it.

Then suddenly I realized it was receding. Thirty feet away? No, now it was more than that—a great, thick rope, waist-high, with a huge spread of white surface behind it.

"Faster!" urged Glora. We ran, and reached the railing. It was higher than our heads. We ran under it, and out upon the white slab—a level surface, larger now than the whole dome-room had been.

Glora, like a fawn ran in advance of us, her draperies flying in the wind. She turned to look back.

"Faster! Faster—or it will be too hard a climb!"

Ahead lay a golden mound of rock. It was widening; raising its top steadily higher. Beyond it and over it was a vast dim distance. We reached the rock, breathless, winded. It was a jagged mound like a great fifty-foot butte. We plunged upon it, began climbing.

The ascent was steep; precipitous in places. There were little gullies, which expanded as we climbed up

them. It seemed that we should never reach the top, but at last we were there. I was aware that the drug had ceased its action. The yellow rocky ground was no longer expanding.

We came to the summit and stood to get back our breath. And Alan and I gazed with awe upon the top of a rocky hill. Little buttes and strewn boulders lay everywhere. It was all naked rock, ridged and pitted, and everywhere yellow-tinged.

Overhead was distance. I could not call it a sky. A blur was there—something almost but not quite distinguishable. Then I thought that I could make out a more solid blur which might be the lower lens of the microscope above us. And there were blurred, very distant spots of light, like huge suns masked by a haze, and I knew that they were the hooded lights of the laboratory room.

Before us, over the brink of a five hundred-foot cliff, a great glistening white plain stretched into the distance. I seemed to see where it ended in a murky blur. And far higher than our own hilltop level a

horizontal streak marked the rope railing of the slab.

"Well," said Alan, "we're here." He gazed behind us, back across the rocky summit which seemed several hundred feet across to its opposite brink. He was smiling, but the smile faded. "Now what, Glora? Another pellet?"

"No. Not yet. There is a place where we go down. It is marked in my mind."

I had a sudden ominous sense that we three were not alone up here. Glora led us back from the cliff. As we picked our way among the naked crags, it seemed behind each of them an enemy might be lurking.

"Glora, do you know if any of Dr. Polter's men have the drug? I mean, do they come in and out here?"

She shook her head. "I think not. He lets no one have the drug. He trusts not any one. I stole it; I will tell you later. Much I have to tell you before we arrive."

Alan made a sudden sidewise leap, and dashed

around a rock. He came back to us, smiling ruefully.

"Gets on your nerves, all this. I had the same idea you did, George. Might be someone around here. But I guess not." He took Glora's hand and they walked in advance of me. "We haven't thanked you yet, Glora."

"Not needed. I came for help from your world. I could not get back to my own, and I followed the Doctor Polter when he came outward. He has made my world, my people, his slaves. I came for help. And because I have helped you needs no thanks."

"But we do thank you, Glora." Alan turned his flushed, earnest face back to me. I thought I had never seen him so handsome, with his boyish, rugged features, and shock of tousled brown hair. The grimness of adventure was upon him, but in his eyes there was something else. It was not for me to see it. That was for Glora; and I think that even then its presence and its meaning did not escape her.

"Stay close, George."

"Yes."

We reached a little gully near the center of the hilltop. It was some twenty feet deep. Glora paused.

"We descend here."

The gully was an unmistakable landmark—open at one end, forty feet long, with the other end terminating in a blind wall, smoothly precipitous. We retraced our steps, entered the gully at its open end, and walked its length. Glora paused by the wall which now loomed above us.

"A pit is here—a hole. I cannot tell just how large it will look when we are in this size."

We found and stood over it—a foot-wide circular hole extending downward. Alan abruptly knelt and shoved his hand and arm into it, but Glora sprang at him.

"Don't do that!"

"Why not? Is this it? How deep is it?"

She retorted sharply, "The Doctor Polter is ahead of us. How far away in size, who knows? Do you want to crush him, and crush that young girl with him?"

Alan's jaw dropped. "Good Lord!"

We stood with the little pit before us, and another of the pellets ready.

"Now!" said Glora.

Again we took the drug, a somewhat larger pellet this time. The familiar sensations began. Everywhere the rocks were creeping with a slow inexorable movement, the landscape expanding around us. The gully walls drew back and upward. In a moment they were precipice cliff-walls and we were in a broad valley.

We had been standing close together. We had not moved except to shift our feet as the expanding ground drew them apart. I became aware that Alan and Glora were a distance from me. Glora called:

"Come, George! We go down, quickly now."

We ran to the pit. It had expanded to a great round hole some six feet wide and equally as deep. Glora let herself down, peered anxiously beneath her, and dropped. Alan and I followed. We jammed the pit; but as we stood there, the walls were receding and lifting.

I had remarked Glora's downward glance, and shuddered. Suppose, in some slightly smaller size, Babs had been here among these rocks!

The pit widened steadily. The movement was far swifter now. We stood presently in a great circular valley. It seemed fully a mile in diameter, with huge encircling walls like a crater rim towering thousands of feet into the air. We ran along the base of one expanding wall, following Glora.

I noticed now that overhead the turgid murk had turned into the blue of distance. A sky. It was faintly sky-blue, and there seemed a haze in it, almost as though clouds were forming. It had been cold when we started. The exertion had kept us fairly

comfortable; but now I realized that the air was far warmer. It was a different air, more humid, and I thought the smell of moist earth was in it. Rocks and boulders were strewn here on the floor of this giant valley, and I saw occasional pools of water. There had been rain recently!

The realization came with a shock of surprise. This was a new world! A faint, luminous twilight was around us. And then I noticed that the light was not altogether coming from overhead. It seemed inherent to the rocks themselves. They glowed very faintly luminous, as though phosphorescent.

We were now well embarked upon this strange journey. We spoke seldom. Glora was intent upon guiding us. She was trying to make the best possible speed. I realized that it was a case of judgment, as well as physical haste. We had dropped into that six-foot pit. Had we waited a few moments longer, the depth would have been a hundred feet, two hundred, a thousand! It would have involved hours of arduous descent—if we had lingered until we were a trifle smaller!

We took other pellets. We traveled perhaps an hour more. There were many instances of Glora's skill. We squeezed into a gully and waited until it widened; we leaped little expanding caverns; we slid down a smooth yellowish slide of rock like a child's toboggan, and saw it behind and over us, rising to become a great spreading ramp extending upward into the blue of the sky. Now, up there, little sailing white clouds were visible. And down where we stood it was deep twilight, queerly silvery with the phosphorescence from the luminous rocks as though some hidden moon were shining.

Strange, new world! I suddenly envisaged the full strangeness of it. Around me were spreading miles of barren, naked landscape. I gazed off to where, across the rugged plateau we were traversing, there was a range of hills. Behind and above them were mountains; serrated tiers, higher and more distant. An infinite spread of landscape! And, as we dwindled, still other vast reaches opened before us. I gazed overhead. Was it—compared to my stature now—a thousand miles, perhaps even a million miles up to

where we had been two or three hours ago? I think so.

Then suddenly I caught the other viewpoint. This was all only an inch of golden quartz—if one were large enough to see it that way!

Alan had been trying to memorize the main topographical features of our route. It was not as difficult as it seemed at first. We were always far larger than normal to our environment. The main distinguishing characteristics of the landscape were obvious—the blind gully, with the round pit, for instance, or the ramp-slide.

We had been traveling some three or four hours when Glora suggested a rest. We were at the side-wall of a broad canyon. The wall towered several hundred feet above us; but a few moments before we had jumped down it with a single leap!

The drug we had last taken had ceased its action. We sat down to rest. It was a wild, mountainous scene around us, deep with luminous gloom. We could

barely see across the canyon to its distant cliff-wall. The wall beside us had been smooth, but now it was broken and ridged. There were ravines in it, and dark holes like cave-mouths. One was near us. Alan gazed at it apprehensively.

"I say, Glora. I don't like sitting here."

I had been telling her all we knew of Polter. She listened quietly, seldom interrupting me. Then she said:

"I understand. I tell you now about Polter as I have seen him."

She talked for five or ten minutes. I listened amazed, awed by what she told.

But Alan suddenly interrupted her. "I say, let's move away from here. That tunnel-mouth, or cave, whatever it is—"

"But we go in there," she protested. "A little tunnel. That is our way to travel. We are not far from my city

now."

Perhaps Alan felt what a generation ago they called a hunch, a premonition, the presage of evil which I think comes strangely to us more often than we realize. Whatever it was, we had no time to act upon it. The tunnel-mouth which had caused Alan's apprehension was about a hundred feet away. It was a ten-foot, black yawning hole in the cliff. Perhaps Alan sensed a movement off there. As I turned to gaze, from the opening came a great hairy human arm! Then a shoulder! A head!

The giant figure of a man came squeezing through the hole on his hands and knees! He gathered himself, and as he stood erect, I saw that he was growing in size! Already he was twenty feet tall compared to us—a thick-set fellow, dressed in leather garments, his legs and bare arms heavily matted with black hair. He stood swaying, gazing around him. I stared up at his round bullet head, his villainous face.

He saw us! Stupid amazement struck him, then comprehension.

He let out a roar and came at us!

Chapter 5: The Message from Polter

Gloria shouted, "Into the tunnel! This way!" She held her wits and darted to one side, with Alan and me after her. We ran through a narrow passage between two fifty-foot boulders which lay close together. Momentarily the giant was out of sight, but we could hear his heavy tread and his panting breath. We emerged; had passed him. He was taller now. He seemed confused at our sudden scampering activity. He checked his forward rush, and ran around the twin boulders. But we had squeezed into a narrow ravine. He could not follow. He threw a rock: to us it was a boulder. It crashed behind us. To him, we were like scampering insects; he could not tell which way we were about to dart.

Alan panted, "Gloria, this—does this lead out?"

The little ravine seemed to open fifty feet ahead of us. Alan stopped, seized a chunk of rock, flung it up. I saw the giant's face above us. He was kneeling, trying to reach in. The rock hit him in the forehead—a pebble, but it stung him. His face rose away.

Again we emerged. The tunnel-mouth was near us. We reached it and flung ourselves into its ten-foot width just as the giant came lunging up. He was far larger than before. Looking back, I could see only the lower part of his legs blocked against the outer light.

"Glora! Alan, where are you?"

For a moment I did not see them. It was darker in this tunnel; broken rocky walls, a jagged arching roof ten feet high. Then I heard Alan's voice.

"George! Here!"

They came running to me. For a moment we stood, undecided what to do. My eyes were growing accustomed to the darkness; it was illumined by a dim phosphorescence from the rocks. I saw Alan fumbling for his vials, but Glora stopped him.

"No! We are the right size."

We were a hundred feet back from the opening. The giant's legs disappeared. But in a moment the round

light hole of the exit was obscured again. His head and shoulders! He was lying prone. His great arms came in. He hitched forward. The width of his expanding shoulders wedged.

I think that he expected to reach us with a single snatch of his tremendous arms. Or perhaps he was confused, and forgot his growth. He did not reach us. His shoulders stuck. Then suddenly he was trying to back out, but could not!

It was only a moment. We stood in the radiant gloom of the tunnel, clinging to each other, ourselves stricken by confusion. The giant's voice roared, reverberating around us. Anger. A note of fear. Finally stark terror. He heaved, but the rocks of the opening held solid. Then there was a crack, a gruesome rattling, splintering—his shoulder bones breaking. His whole gigantic body gave a last convulsive lunge, and he emitted a deafening shrill scream of agony.

I was aware of the tunnel-mouth breaking upward. Falling rocks—an avalanche, a cataclysm around us. Then light overhead.

The giant's crushed body lay motionless. A pile of boulders, rocks and loose metallic earth was strewn upon his head and torso, illumined by the outer light through a jagged rent where the cliff-face had fallen down.

We were unhurt, crouching back from the avalanche. The giant's mangled body was still expanding; shoving at the litter of loose rocks. In a moment it would again be too large for the broken cliff opening.

I found my wits. "Alan! Out of here—God! Don't you see—"

But Glora held us. The drug the giant had taken was about at its end, and Glora recognized it. The growth presently stopped. That huge, noisome mass of pulp which once had been human shoulders—

I shoved Glora away. "Don't look!" I was shaking; my head was reeling. Alan's face, painted by the phosphorescence, was ghastly.

Glora pulled at us. "This way! The tunnel is not too

long. We go."

But the giant had drugs. And perhaps weapons.

"Wait!" I urged. "You two wait here. I'll climb over him."

I told them why, and ran. I can only leave to the imagination that brief exploratory climb. The broken body seemed at least a hundred feet long; the mangled shoulders and chest filled the great torn hole in the cliff. I climbed over the litter. Indescribable, horrible scene! A river of warm blood was flowing down the declivity outside....

I came back to Glora and Alan. Under my arm was a huge cylinder vial. It was black—the enlarging drug. I set it down. They stared at me in my blood-stained garments.

"George! You're—"

"His blood, not mine, Alan." I tried to smile. "There's the drug he carried. Evidently Polter was only sending him out. Just the one drug."

"What'll we do with it?" Alan demanded. "Look at the size of it!"

"Destroy it," said Glora. "See, that is not difficult." She tugged at the huge stopper, and exposed a few of the pellets—to us as large as apples. "The air will soon spoil it."

We left it in the tunnel. I had brought a great roll of paper; had found it folded in the giant's belt, with the drug cylinder. We unrolled it, and hauled its folds to a spread some ten feet long. It was covered with a scrawled handwriting in pencil, but its giant characters seemed thick blurred strokes of charcoal. We could not read it; we were too close. Alan and Glora held it up against the tunnel wall. From a distance I could make it out. It was a note written in English, signed "Polter," evidently to one of his men.

I read it:

"The two men prisoners, kill them at once. That is better. It will be too dangerous to wait for my return. Put their bodies with their airplane. Crash it a mile or

more from our gate."

Full directions for our death followed. And Polter said he would return by dawn or soon after.

It gave me a start. By dawn! We had been traveling four or five hours. The dawn was up there now!

"No," said Glora. She and Alan cast away the paper.

"No, the time in here is different. A different time-rate. I do not know how much difference. My world speeds faster; yours is very slow. It is not the dawn up there quite yet."

Again my mind strove to encompass these things so strange. A faster time-rate prevailed in here? Then our lives were passing more quickly. We were living, experiencing things, compressed into a shorter interval. It was not apparent; there was nothing to which comparison could be made. I recalled Alan's description of Polter—not thirty years old as he should have been, but nearer fifty. I could understand that, now. A day in here—while our gigantic world outside might only have progressed a few hours.

We walked the length of the tunnel. I suppose it was a quarter of a mile, to us in this size. It wound through the cliff with a steady downward slope. And suddenly I realized that we had turned downward nearly half the diameter of a circle! We had turned over—or at least it seemed so. But the gravity was the same. I had noticed from the beginning very little change.

The realization of this turning brought a mental confusion. I lost all sense of direction. The outer world of Earth was under my feet, instead of overhead. Then we went level. I forgot the confusion; this was normality here. We turned upward a little. Cross tunnels intersected ours at intervals. I saw caverns, open, widened tunnels, as though this mountain were honeycombed.

"Look!" said Glora. "There is the way out. All these passages lead the same way."

There was a glow of light ahead. I recall that I was at that moment fumbling at my belt in two small compartments of which I was carrying the two vials of the drugs which Glora had given me. Alan wore the

same sort of belt. We had found them in the wrecked dome-room. I heard a click on the ground at my feet. I was about to stoop to see what I had kicked—only a loose stone, perhaps—but Glora's words distracted me. I did not stoop. If only I had, how different events might have been!

The glow of light ahead of us widened as we approached, and presently we stood at the end of the tunnel. A spread of open distance was outside. We were on a ledge of a rocky, precipitous wall some fifty feet above a wide level landscape. Vegetation! I saw trees—a forest off to the left. A range of naked hills lay behind it. A mile away, in front and to the right, a little town nestled on the shore of shining water. There was starlight on the water! And over it a vast blue-purple sky was studded with stars!

I gazed, with that first sudden shock of emotion, into illimitable depths of interplanetary space! Light years of distance. Gigantic worlds, blazing suns off there shrunk by distance now to little points of light. A universe was here!

But this was an inch of golden quartz!

Above my head were stars which, compared to my bodily size now, were vast worlds ten thousand light-years away! Yet, from the other viewpoint, I had only descended perhaps an eighth or a quarter of an inch beneath the broken pitted surface of a little fragment of golden quartz the size of a walnut—into just one of its myriads of golden atoms!

Chapter 6: The Girl in the Golden Cage

"My world," Glora was saying. "You like it? See the starlight on the lake? I have heard that your world looks like this at night, in summer. Ours is always like this. No day, no night. Just like this—starlight." Her hand went to Alan's shoulder. "You like it? My world?"

"Yes. Yes, Glora, It's beautiful."

There seemed a sheen on everything, a soft, glowing sheen of phosphorescence from the rocks rising to meet the pale wan starlight. The night air was soft, with a gentle breeze that rippled the distant lake into a great spread of gold and silver light.

The city was called Orena. I saw at once that we were about normal size to its houses and people. There were fields beneath our ledge, with farm implements lying in them; no workers, for this was the time for sleep. Ribbons of roads wound over the country, pale streamers in the starlight.

Glora gestured. "The giants are on their island."

Everyone sleeps now. You see the island off there?"

Beyond the city, over the low stone roofs of its flat-topped dwellings, the silver spread of lake showed a green-clad island some three miles off shore. The distance made its white stone houses seem small. But as I gazed, I realized that they were large to their environment, all far larger than those of the little town. The island was perhaps a mile in length. Between it and the mainland a boat was coming toward us. It was a dark blob of hull on the shining water, and above it a queerly shaped circular sail was puffed out like a balloon-parachute by the wind.

"The giants live, there?" said Alan.

"You mean Polter's men?"

"And women. Yes."

"Are there many giants?"

"No."

"How many?" I put in. "How large are they? In relation to us now, I mean. And to your normal size?"

I turned to Alan. "Polter and Babs must be down there now! They must have arrived only recently. But we must determine what size to be before we go any further. We can't be gigantic If he sees us—if we assailed him—well, he'd kill Babs. We're got to plan. Glora tell us—"

"You ask so many questions so fast, George. There are two hundred or more of the giants. And there are more than that many thousands of our people here. Slaves, because the giants are four times as large. This little city, these fields, these hills of stone and metal, all this was ours to have in peace and happiness—until your Polter came. And that starlight on the water—"

She gestured. "Everywhere is a great reach of desert and forests. Insects, but there are no wild beasts—nothing to harm us. Nature is kind here. The weather is always like this. We were happy—until Polter came."

"And only a few thousand people," Alan said. "No other cities?"

"What lies off in the great distance we do not know. Our nation is ten times what is here. A few other cities, though some of our people live in the forests—"

She broke off. "That boat is coming for Polter. He is in the city, no doubt of that. The boat will take him and that girl you call Babs to the giant's island. His castle is there."

If we could get on that boat and go with him to the island—! But in what size? Very small? But then, if we were very small it would take us hours to get from here to the boat. Glora pointed out where it would land—just beyond the village where the houses were set in a sparse fringe. It would be there, apparently, in ten or fifteen minutes. Polter was probably there now with Babs, waiting for it.

In our present size we could not get there in time. It was two or three miles at least. But a trifle larger—the size of one of Polter's giants—would enable us to

make it. We would be seen, but in the pale starlight, keeping away from the city as much as possible, we might only be mistaken for Polter's people. And when we got closer we would diminish our size, creep into the boat, get near Babs and Polter and then plan what to do.

Futile plans! All of life is so futile, so wind-swept upon the tossing sea of chance!

We climbed down from the ledge and stood at the base of the towering cliff which reared its jagged wall against the stars. A field and a road were near us. The road seemed of normal size. A man was across the field. He did not seem to notice us. He was apparently about my height. He presently discarded his work, went away from us and vanished.

"Hurry, Glora." Alan and I stood beside her while she took pellets from her vials. It needed a careful adjustment. We wanted our stature now to be four times what it was. Glora gave us pellets of both drugs, one of which was slightly more intense than the other.

"Polter made them this way," she said. "The two at once gives just the growth to take us from this normal size to the stature of the giants."

Alan and I did not touch our own vials. We had used none of our enlarging drug upon the journey; the supply she had given us of the other was nearly gone.

As I took these pellets which Glora now gave us, standing there by the side of that road, I recall that I was struck with the realization that never once upon this journey had I conceived myself to be other than normal stature. I am normally about six feet tall. I still felt—there in that golden atom—the same height. This landscape seemed of normal size. There were trees nearby—spreading, fantastic looking growths with great strings of pods hanging from them. But still, as I looked up to see one arching over me with its blue-brown leaves and an air-vine carrying vivid yellow blossoms—whatever the size of the tree, my consciousness could only conceive myself as of a normal six-foot stature standing beneath it. The human ego always is supreme! Around each man's consciousness of himself the entire universe revolves!

We crouched on the ground when this growth now began; it would not do to be observed changing size. Polter's giants never did that. Years before, he had made them large—his few hundred men and women. They were, Glora said, people both of this realm and from our great world above—dissolute, criminal characters who now had set themselves up here as the nucleus of a ruling race.

In a moment now, we were the size of these giants. Twenty to twenty-five feet tall, in relation to this environment. But I did not feel so. As I stood up—still myself in normal stature—I saw around me a shrunken little landscape. The trees, as though in a Japanese garden, were about my own height; the road was a smooth level path: the little field near us a toy fence around it. In another road across it, the man was walking. In height he would barely have reached my knees. He saw us rise beside the trees. He darted off his road in alarm, and disappeared.

I have taken longer to tell all this than the actual time which passed. We could see the boat coming from the island, and it was still a fair distance off shore. We ran

along the road, skirting the edge of the little town. Its houses were none of them taller than ourselves. The windows and doorways were ovals into which we could only have inserted a head or an arm. They were most of them dark. Little people occasionally stared out, saw us run past, and ducked back, thankful that we did not stop to harass them.

"This way," said Glora. She ran like a fawn, hardly winded, with Alan and me heavily panting behind her. "There are trees—thick trees—quite near where the boat lands. We can get in them and hide and change our size to smallness. But hurry, for we will need so much time when we are small!"

The little spread of town and the shining lake remained always to our right. In five minutes we were past most of the houses. A patch of woods, with thick interlacing treetops about our own height, lay ahead. It extended a few hundred feet over to the lake shore. The sailboat was heading in close. There was a broad, starlit roadway at the edge of the lake, and a dock there at which the boat was preparing to land.

Would we be in time? I suddenly feared not. To get small now, with distance lengthening between us and the boat, would be disastrous. And where was Polter?

Abruptly we saw him. There had been only little people visible to us; none of our own height. The lake roadway by the dock was brightly starlit. As we approached the intervening patch of woods it seemed that a crowd of little people were near the dock.

Polter must have been sitting. But now he rose up. We could not mistake his hunched thick figure, the lump on his shoulders clear in the starlight with the gleaming lake as a background. The crowd of little figures were milling around his knees. In the silence of the night the murmur of their voices floated over to us.

"There he is!" Alan gasped. We all three checked our running; we were at the edge of the patch of woods.

"By God, there he is! Let's get larger! Rush him! Why that's only a few hundred feet over there!"

But Babs? Where was Babs?

"Alan! Down!" I crouched, pulling Alan and Glora with me. "Don't let him see us! He'd know at once—and where is Babs? Can't rush him, Alan. He'd see us coming—kill her—"

Of all the strange events which had been flung at us, I think this sudden crisis now most confused Alan and me. To get larger, or smaller? Which? Yet something must be done at once.

Glora said, "We can get through the woods best in this size. And not be seen—get closer to the landing."

We crouched so that the little treetops were always well over us. The patch of woods was dark. A soil of black loam was under us, a thick soft underbrush reached our knees, and lacy, flexible leaves and branches were at our shoulder height. We pushed them aside, forcing our way softly forward. It was not far. The little murmuring voices of the crowd grew louder.

Presently we were crouching at the other edge of the woods. I softly shoved the tree branches aside until

we could all three get a clear view of the strange scene now directly before us.

And I saw a toy dock, at which a twenty-foot, barge-like open sailboat was landing; a narrow starlit roadway, crowded with a milling throng of people all no more than a foot and a half in height. The crowd milled almost to where we were crouching, unseen in the shrubbery.

Across the road by the dock. Polter stood with the crowd down around his knees. In height he seemed the old familiar Polter. Bareheaded, with his shaggy black hair shot with white. He was dressed in Earth fashion: narrow black evening trousers and a white shirt and collar with flowing black tie. I saw at once what Alan had noticed—the change in him. An abnormality of age. I would have called him now forty, or older. Beyond even that there was an abnormality. A man old before his time; or younger than he should have been for the years he had lived. An indescribable mingling of something. The mingling, of the two worlds, perhaps. It marked him with a look at once unnatural and sinister.

These were instant impressions. Glora was plucking at me. "On the white chest of his shirt, something is there."

Polter was coatless, with snowy white shirt and cuffs to his thick wrists. He was no more than fifty feet from us. On his shirt bosom something golden in color was hanging like a large bauble, an ornament, an insignia. It was strapped tightly there with a band about his chest, a cord like a necklace chain up to his thick hunched neck, and other chains down to his belt.

I stared at it. An ornament, like a cube held flat against his shirt-front—a little golden cube, ornate with tiny bars.

I heard Alan murmuring, "A cage! Why George, it's—"

And then, simultaneously, realization struck me. It was a golden cage strapped there. And I seemed to see that there was something in it. A tiny figure?
Babs!

"I think he has her there," Glora murmured. "You see the little box with bars? The girl Babs, a prisoner in there." She spoke swiftly, vehemently. "He will take the boat to the island."

She suddenly gripped us. "You think really it best to go? I do what you say. I had the wish to get to my father with these drugs."

"No!" exclaimed Alan. "We must keep close to Polter!"

We were ready with our pellets. But a sudden activity in the road made us pause. The crowd of little people were hostile to Polter. A sullen hostility. They milled about him as he stood there, gazing down at them sardonically.

And abruptly he shouted at them in English. "You speak my language, some of you. Then listen."

The crowd fell silent.

"Listen. This iss your future Queen. Can you see her? She iss small now. But she has the magic power. Soon,

she will be large. Like me."

The crowd was shouting again. It surged forward, but it lacked a leader, and those in advance shoved backward in fear.

Polter spoke again. "This girl from my world, you will like her. She iss kind and very beautiful. When she iss large, you will see how beautiful."

A little stone suddenly came up from the throng of little people and struck Polter on the shoulder. Then another. The crowd, emboldened, made a rush; surged against his legs.

He shouted, "You do that? Why how dare you? I show to you what giants do when you make dem angry!"

From down by his knees he plucked the small figure of a man. The crowd scattered with shouts of terror. Polter had the struggling eighteen-inch figure by the wrist. He whirled it around his head like a nine-pin and flung it over the canopy of the dock far out into the shimmering lake!

Chapter 7: Within the Golden Cage

The trees around us expanded to towering forest giants. The underbrush rose up over our heads. We had taken only a taste of the diminishing drug; Glora showed us how to touch it to our tongue several times, to adjust our size as we became smaller. It was no more than a minute of diminishing. We could hear the roar of the crowd, and Polter's voice shouting. We ran forward through the great forest. It was a fair distance out to the starlit road. We saw it as a wide shining esplanade. The people now were giants twice our height! Polter, himself towering with a seeming fifty foot stature, was standing by the gigantic canopy of the dock. He had dispersed the crowd. There was an open space on the esplanade—a run for us of about a hundred feet.

"We've got to chance it!" I murmured. "Make a run of it—now."

We darted across. In the confusion, with all eyes centered on Polter, we escaped discovery. It was dim under the dock canopy. Polter had backed from the

road and was walking to the barge. It lay like the length of an ocean liner, its sail looming an enormous spread above it. The gunwale was level with the dock-floor. A dozen or more fifty-foot men were greeting Polter. They were amidships.

I realize now that in those moments as we scurried aboard like wharf rats, we took wild chances. We made for the stern which momentarily was unoccupied. To Polter and his men we were eight or nine inches tall. We dropped over the gunwale, slid down the convex thirty or forty-foot incline of the interior and landed on the bottom of the boat.

There were many places where we could safely hide. A litter of gigantic rope-strands was around us. We could see the bottom of a cross-bench looming overhead, and the great curving sides of the vessel with the gunwales outlined against the starlight.

The boat left the dock in a moment; the sail bellied out enormous over us. Ten feet forward from us the towering figure of a man sat on a bench with the steering mechanism before him. Further on, the other

men were dispersed, with one or two in the distant bow. Polter reclined on a cushioned couch amidships. Looking along the dark widely level bottom of the boat there were only the feet and legs of the men visible.

Alan whispered, "Let's get closer."

We were insects soundlessly scuttling unnoticed in the dimness. And it was noisy down here—the clank of the steering mechanism; the swish, and surge of the water against the hull; the voices of the men.

We passed the boots of the seated helmsmen, and found another hiding place nearer Polter. We could see his giant length plainly. None of the other men were near him. He was reclining on an elbow, stretched at ease on the cushion. And at the moment, he was fumbling with the chains that fastened the little golden cage to his chest. The cage was double its former size to us now. A shaft of pale light came down, reflected from the great sail surface overhead. It struck the bars of the cage. We could see a small figure in there.

Babs!

Then we heard Polter's voice. "I will let you out, Babs. You come out, sit on my hand and talk with me. That will be nice? We haf a little time."

He unfastened the cage and put it on the cushion beside him. He was still propped up on one elbow.

"I let you out, now. Be careful, Babs."

My heart was almost smothering me. "Alan! We've got to get still closer! Try something! Get large, shall we?"

Alan whispered tensely, "I don't know! Oh, I don't know what to do! This thing—"

This thing so strange.

"We can get closer," Glora whispered. "But never larger—not here. They would discover us too soon."

We crept forward. We reached the edge of the

cushion. Its top surface was a trifle lower than our heads—a billowing, wrinkled mass of fabric. But I saw that the folds of it were rough enough to afford a foothold. I thought that I could climb it. We stood erect. There was a deep shadow along here, but it was brighter on the cushion top. We could see over its edge; an undulating spread of surface with the giant length of Polter stretched there. The cage was nearer to us. Polter's great fingers fumbled with it; a door in the lattice bars flipped open.

"Careful, my Babs!" His voice was a throaty, rumbling roar from above us. "Careful! I do not want you to be hurt."

From the little doorway came the figure of Babs! The starlight glowed on her long blue dress; her black hair was tumbling over her shoulders; her face was pale, but she was unhurt.

Babs! I think that I had never loved her so much as at that moment. Nor ever seen her so beautiful as in that miniature, standing at the door of her golden cage, bravely facing the monstrous misshapen figure of her

captor.

We heard her small voice.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Stand quiet. Now I put my hand for you."

His monstrous hand bristled with a thatch of heavy black hair. He brought it carefully sliding along the cushion. Babs was barely the length of one of its finger joints. She climbed upon its palm.

"That iss right, Babs. Now I bring you—hold tight to my finger. Here, I crook the little one. Fling your arms around it."

With a swoop his hand took her aloft and away. Then we saw her, twenty feet or so in the air, still on his hand as he held it near his face.

"Now we haf a little talk, Babs. When we get to the island, I put you back in your cage."

I had a sudden flash of realization. Something I could do. I did not plan it. I know now my judgment was bad. I recall it struck me that Alan would want to do it also. And, perhaps, even Glora. That would not work. My chances, however desperate, were better alone. And Glora and Alan—in our present size—could doubtless disembark safely. Glora knew the lay-out of the island. She could follow Polter.

Alan and Glora were standing beside me, peering over that billowing cushion spread toward the distant giant palm with Babs standing upon it. I gripped Alan's shoulder.

"See here, Alan," I whispered vehemently, "whatever happens, we must follow Polter. Glora knows the way. Some chance will come. What we want is an opportunity to get large without discovery. Then rush Polter!"

Alan's white face turned to me. "Yes, that's what we're planning. But George, here on this boat—"

"Of course. Can't do it here. Tell Glora, be sure and

follow Polter. Whatever happens, you think of nothing else: you won't, will you?"

"George, what—"

"We've got to make some opportunity." I was trembling inside, fearful that Alan would be suspicious of me. Yet I had to make sure that he and Glora would stay as close to Polter as possible.

"Yes," Alan agreed. "Listen to them."

Polter was talking to Babs. But I did not hear the words. I moved a trifle away. Rash decision! I hardly decided anything. There was only the vision of Babs before me; my love for her. And my desperate need of doing something; getting to her; seeing her, being with her; having her near my own size again as though the blessed normality of that would rationalize and lessen her danger. If only I had been less rash! If only back there in that tunnel I had stopped to see what it was my foot kicked against!

I slid away. Alan and Glora did not notice it; they were

whispering together and gazing over the cushion at Babs. In the floor shadow I moved some ten feet. On the undulating top of the cushion the little golden cage stood with its lattice door open! It was only a few feet from my face.

I fumbled at my belt for the diminishing vial. I found one pellet left. Well, that would be enough. I was hurried. Alan might discover me. Polter might move; put Babs back in the cage and close its door. We might be near the island already, and the confusion, the activity of disembarking would defeat me. A thousand things might happen.

I touched the pellet to my tongue. In a few seconds the drug action had come and passed. The cushion top loomed well over my head. The side was a ridged, indescribably unnatural vista of cliff-wall. The fabric was coarse with hairy strands, dented into little ravines and crevices. I climbed. I came panting to the pillow surface. The golden cage was six or eight feet away and was now two feet high.

Again I touched the drug to my tongue; held it an

instant. The cage drew away; grew to a normal six-foot height; then larger, until in a moment it stopped. I stood peering at it, trying to gauge its size in relation to me. I wanted so intensely now to be normal to Babs. The cage seemed about ten feet high. A little less, possibly. I barely tasted the pellet, and replaced it carefully in the vial. I could only hope its efficacy would be preserved.

I had to chance that I would not be seen now crossing this billowy expanse. I ran. The rope strands of the fabric now had spaces between their curving surfaces. The cage was a shining golden house, set on this wide rolling area. Far in the distance there was a blur—Polter's reclining body.

I reached the cage. It was a room about ten feet square and equally as high. Walled solid, top and bottom, and on three sides. The front was a lattice of bars, with a narrow six-foot-high doorway, standing open now.

I dashed in. The interior was not wholly bare. There was a metal-wrought couch fastened to the wall, with

a railing around it and handles. It suggested a ship's bunk. There was a railing at convenient height all around the wall.

I sought a hiding place. I saw just one—under the couch. It was secluded enough. There was a grille-like lattice extending down from the seat to the floor. I squeezed under one end, and lay wedged behind the grille.

How much time passed I do not know. My thoughts were racing. Babs would be coming.

I heard the distant approaching rumble of Polter's voice. Through the grille I could see across the floor of the ten-foot cage to the front lattice bars. Outside, there appeared a huge, pink-white, mottled blob—Polter's hand, a ridged and pitted surface with great bristling black stalks of hair.

The figure of Babs came through the cage doorway. Blessed normality! The same slim little Babs who always stood, since we were both matured, with her head about level with my shoulders.

The latticed door swung shut with a reverberating metallic clank. Babs stood tense, clinging to the wall railing. I heard the blurred rumble of Polter's voice.

"Hold tightly, my little Babs!"

The room lurched; went upward and sidewise with a wild dizzying swoop. Babs clung; and I was wedged prone under the couch. Then the movement stopped; there was a jolting, rocking, and outside I heard the clank of metal. Polter was fastening the chains of the cage to his chest.

A white reflected glow now came through the bars. It was starlight reflected from Polter's shirt bosom. An abyss of distance was outside. I could see nothing but the white glow.

Momentarily there was very little movement to the room. Only the rhythmic sway of Polter's breathing and an occasional jolt as he shifted his position. The floor was tilted at a sharp angle. Babs came toward the couch, pulling herself along the wall railing.

I called softly, "Babs! Babs, dear!"

She stopped. I called again, "Babs! Don't cry out! It's George! Here—stand still!"

She gave a little cry. "George—where are you? I don't —"

I slid out from my concealment and stood up, holding to the railing.

"Babs, dear."

Blessed normality of size! She cried again, "George! You! George, dear—"

She edged along the railing, a step or two down the tilting floor, then released her hold and flung herself into my waiting arms.

"I think we are landing. Hold the railing, George. When the room moves it goes with a rush."

Babs laughed softly. It must have seemed to her, after

being alone in here, that now our plight was far less desperate. She had told me how she was captured. A man accosted her on the terrace, saying he wanted to speak to her about Alan. Then a weapon threatened her. Amid all those people she was held up in old fashioned style, hurried to a taxicar and whirled away.

She was saying now, "When Polter moves, it is dizzying. You'll see."

"I have already, Babs. Heavens, that swoop!"

The room was more level now. We carefully drew ourselves to the front lattice. Polter was standing, and we had the white sheen from his shirt-front. A sheer drop was outside the bars, but looking down I could see the outlines of his body with the huge spread of the boat interior underneath us.

A confusion of rumbling voices sounded. Blurred giant shapes were outside. The room jolted and swayed as the boat landed and Polter disembarked.

Babs stood clinging to me. Blessed normality of size!

We, at least, were normal—this metal barred room, Babs and I. But outside was the abnormality of largeness. I think that in relation to us, the men were of over two hundred foot stature, and the hunched Polter a trifle less. It seemed as he walked that we were lurching at least a hundred and fifty feet above the ground.

"You had better hide," Babs urged. "He might stop and speak to someone. If anyone peered in here you would be seen: no chance then, even to get across the room."

It was true. But for a few moments I lingered, though I could distinguish vegetation on their flat roof-tops, as though flower-gardens were laid there.

We passed a house with its hundred-foot oval windows all aglow with light. Music floated out—a distant blare of musical sounds, and the ribald laughter of giant voices. I had seen no women among these giants of the islands. But now a huge face was at one of the ovals. A dissolute, painted woman of Earth, staring out at Polter as he passed. It was like

the enormous close-up image on a large motion picture screen. She shouted a ribald jest as he went by.

"George, please go back. Suppose she had seen you?"

We were ascending a hill. A distance ahead a great oblong building loomed like a giant's palace, which indeed it was. We headed for it, passed through a vast arching doorway into the greater dimness of an echoing interior. I scurried back across the lurching room and again wedged myself under the couch. Babs stood at the lattice ten feet away. We dared to talk in low tones; the rumbling voices and footsteps outside would make our tiny voices inaudible to Polter.

I was tense with my plans. I had told them to Babs. With the one partially used remaining pellet of the diminishing drug we could make ourselves small enough to walk out through the bars. Then my black vial of the enlarging chemicals, as yet unused, would take us up, out to our own world. We could not use the drugs now. But the chance might come when Polter would set the cage on the ground, or

somewhere so that we might climb down from it, with a chance to hide and get large before we were discovered. I would fight our way upward; all I needed was a fair start in size.

But I lay now with doubts assailing me. This was the first moment I had had for calm thoughts, though in truth they were far from calm! Where were Alan and Glora? Following us now? I could only hope so. Once out of this, Babs and I would have to rejoin them. But how? A panic swept me. I should not have left them. Or at least I should have told them what I was trying, and given Alan a chance to plan.

The panic grew upon me, the premonition of disaster. From my belt I took the opalescent vial with its one partly used pellet. I dumped the pellet out. It was spoiling! The former exposure of the air, the moisture of my tongue, had ruined it! I had no need to guess at the catastrophe; as I held its crumbling, deliquescent fragments on my palm it melted into vapor and was gone!

We could not make ourselves smaller! We would have

to wait now until Polter opened the cage. But once outside, the enlarging drug would give us our chance to fight our way upward. My trembling fingers sought the black vial in my belt. It was not there! My mind flung back: in that tunnel, something had dropped and I had kicked it! Accursed chance! My accursed, heedless stupidity!

I had lost the black vial! We were helpless! Caged! Marooned here in a size microscopic!

Chapter 8: From a Drop of Water

I lay concealed, and Babs stood at the lattice of our cage room. I was aware that Polter had entered some vast apartment of this giant palace. A brighter light was outside; I heard voices—Polter's and another man's. I could see the distant monster shape of one. He was at first so far away that all his outline was visible. A seated man, in a huge white room. I thought there were great shelves with enormous bottles. The spread of table tops passed under our cage as Polter walked by them. They held a litter of apparatus, and there was the smell of chemicals in the air. It seemed that this was a laboratory.

The man stood up to greet Polter. I had a glimpse of his head and shoulders level with us. He wore a white linen coat, open, soft collar and black tie. He seemed an old man, queerly old, with snow-white hair....

I had an instant of whirling, confused impressions. Something was familiar about his face. It was seamed and wrinkled with lines of age and care. There were gentle blue eyes.

Then all I could see was the vast spread of his white shirt and coat, a black splotch of his tie outside our bars as Polter faced him.

Babs gave a low cry. "Why—why—dear God—"

And then I knew! And Polter's words were not needed, though I heard their rumble.

"I am back again, Kent. Are you still rebellious? You haf still determined to compound no more of our drugs? You would rather I killed you? Then see what I haf here. This little cage, someone—"

It was Dr. Kent, a prisoner here all these years!

Babs turned her white face toward me. "George, it's father! He's alive! Here!"

"Quiet, Babs! Don't let them know I'm here. Remember!"

The old man recognized her. "Babs!" It was an agonized cry. The blur of him was gone as he sank

down into his chair.

Polter continued standing. I could envisage his sardonic grin. Babs was calling:

"Father, dear! Father!"

From over us came Polter's rumble. "She iss glad to see you, Kent. I haf her here, safe. You always knew I would nefer be satisfied until I had my little Babs? Well, now I haf her. Can you hear me?"

A sudden desperate calmness fell on Babs. She called evenly, "Yes, I hear you. Father, do not anger him. Do not rebel; do what he commands. Dr. Polter, will you let me be with my father? After all these years, let me be with him, just for a little while. In his size—normal."

"Hah! My Babs iss scheming."

"No! I want to talk to him, after so long. These years when I thought he was dead."

"Scheming. You think, my little Babs, that he has the drugs? I am not so much a fool. He makes them. He can do that, and the last secret reactions only he can perform. He iss stubborn. Never would he tell me that one reaction. But he makes no drugs complete, only when I am here."

"No, Dr. Polter! I want only to be with him."

The old man's broken voice floated up to us. "You will not harm her, Polter?"

"No. Fear nothing. But you no longer rebel?"

"I will do what you tell me." The tones carried hopeless resignation, years of being beaten down, rebelling—but now this last blow vanquished him. Then he spoke again, with a sudden strange fire.

"Even for the life of my daughter, I will not make your drugs, Polter, if you mean to harm our Earth."

The golden cage room swooped as Polter sat down.

"Hah! Now we bargain. What do you care what I do to

your world? You never will see it again. I can lie to you. My plans—"

"I do care."

"Well, I will tell you, Kent. I am good natured now. Why should I not be, with my dear little Babs? I tell you. I am done with the Earth world. It iss so much nicer here. My friends, they haf a good time always. We like this little atom realm. I am going out once more. I must hide the little piece of golden quartz so no harm will come to it."

Polter was evidently in a high good humor. His voice fell to an intimate tone of comradeship; but still I could not mistake the irony of it.

"You listen to me, Kent. There was a time, years ago, when we were good friends. You liked your young assistant, the hunchback Polter. Iss it not so? Then why should we quarrel now? I am gifing up the Earth world. I wanted of it only the little Babs.... You look at me so strange! You do not speak."

"There is nothing to say," retorted Dr. Kent wearily.

"Then you listen. I haf much gold above, in Quebec. You know that. So very simple to take it out of our atom, grow large with it, to what we call up there the size of a hundred feet. I haf a place, a room, secluded from prying eyes under a dome-roof. I become very tall, holding a piece of gold. It is large when I am a hundred feet tall. So I haf collected much gold. They think I own a mine. I haf a smelter and my gold quartz I make into ingots, refined to the standard purity. So simple, and I am a rich man.

"But gold does not bring happiness, my friend Kent." He chuckled ironically at his use of the platitude.

"There is more in life than the ownership of gold. You ask my plans. I haf Babs, now. I am gifting up our Earth world. The mysterious man they know as Frank Rascor will vanish. I will hide our little fragment of quartz. No one up there will even try to find it. Then I come down here, with Babs, and we will haf so nice a little government and rule this world. No more of the drugs then will be needed, Kent. When you die, let the secret die with you."

Again Polter's voice turned ingratiating, even more so than before. "We will be friends, Kent. Our little Babs will love me; why should she not? You will tell her—advise her—and we will all three be very happy."

Dr. Kent said abruptly, "Then leave her with me now. That was her request, a moment ago. If you expect to treat her kindly, then why not—"

"I do! I do! But not now. I cannot spare her now. I am very busy, but I must take her with me."

Babs had been silent, clinging to the bars of our cage. She called:

"Why? I ask you to put this cage down."

"Not now, little bird."

"And let me be with my father."

It struck a pang through me. Babs was scheming, but not the way Polter thought. She wanted the cage put on the floor, herself out, and a chance for me to

escape. I had not yet told her of my miserable stupidity in losing the vial.

Polter was repeating. "No, little bird. Presently; not now. I may take you out with me, my last trip out. I want to talk with you in a normal size when I haf time."

Our room swooped as he stood up. "You think over what I haf said, Kent. You get ready now to make the fresh drugs I will need to bring down all my men from the outer world. They will all be glad to come, or, if not—well, we can easily kill those who refuse. You make the drugs. I need plenty. Will you?"

"Yes."

"That iss good. I come back soon and gif you the catalyst for that last reaction. Will you be ready?"

"Yes."

The blur outside our bars swung with a dizzying whirl as Polter turned and left the room, locking its door

after him with a reverberating clank.

Left alone in his laboratory, Dr. Kent began his preparations for making a fresh supply of the drugs. This room, with two smaller ones adjoining, was at once his workshop and his prison. He stood at his shelves, selecting the basic chemicals. He could not complete the final compounds. The catalyst which was necessary to the final reaction would be brought to him by Polter.

How long he worked there with his thoughts in a whirl at seeing Babs, he did not know. His movements were automatic; he had done all this so many times before. His mind was confused, and he was trembling from head to foot, an old, queerly, unnaturally old man now—unnerved. His shaking fingers could hardly hold the test tubes.

His thoughts were flying. Babs was here, come down from the world above. It was disaster—the thing he had feared all these years.

He suddenly heard a voice.

"Father!"

And again: "Father!" A tiny voice, down by his shoe-tops. Two small figures were there on the floor beside him. They were both panting, winded by running. They were enlarging; they had come from a smaller size.

It was Alan and Glora, who had followed Polter from the boat, diminished again, and come running through the tiny crack under the metal door of the laboratory.

They grew to a foot in size, down by Dr. Kent's legs. He was too unnerved; he sat in a chair while Alan swiftly told him what had happened. Babs was in the golden cage. Dr. Kent knew that; but none of them knew what had happened to me.

"We must make you small, Father. We have the drugs, here with us."

"Yes! Yes, Alan. How much have you? Show me. Oh, my boy, that you are here—and Babs—"

"Don't you worry, we'll get away from him."

Glora and Alan had almost reached Dr. Kent's size before their excited fingers could get out the vials. They took some of the diminishing drug to check their growth. Alan handed his father a black vial.

"Yes, lad—"

"No! Wait, Father! That's the wrong drug. This other —"

Dr. Kent had opened the vial. His trembling hand spilled some of the pellets, but none of them noticed it.

"Father, dear, this one." Alan held an opalescent vial.
"This one."

Glora said abruptly, "Listen! Is that someone coming?"

They thought they heard approaching footsteps. A moment passed, but no one came into the room.

"Hurry," urged Glora. "It is nothing. We wait too long."

"My boy—Alan, dear, after all these years—"

They were about to take the diminishing drug. From across the room there came a very queer sound. A scuttling, scratching, and the drone of wings.

"Father, good God—look!"

Over by the wall, a giant fly was running across the floor. It was growing larger!

At Dr. Kent's feet the pellets he had dropped were crushed by his footsteps and strewn on the floor. A fly had eaten of the sweetish powder.

The enlarging drug was loose!

A few drops of water lay mingled with the drug on the

floor. And from the water nameless hideous things
were rising!

Chapter 9: The Doomed Realm

To Alan the first few moments that followed the escape of the drug were the most horrible of his life. The discovery struck old Dr. Kent, Glora and Alan into a numb, blank confusion. They stood transfixed, staring with cold terror. The fly was scurrying along the floor close against the wall. Already it was as large as Alan's hand. It ran into the corner, hit the wall in its confused alarm, and turned back. Its wings were droning with an audible hum. It reared itself on its hairy legs, lifted and sailed across the room.

As though drawn by a magnet Alan turned to watch it. It landed on the wall. Alan was aware of Dr. Kent rushing with trembling steps to a shelf where bottles stood. Glora was stricken into immobility, the blood draining from her face.

The fly flew again. It passed directly over Alan. Its body, with a membrane sac of eggs, was now as large as his head; its wide-spread transparent wings were beating with a reverberating drone.

Alan flung a bottle which was on the table beside him. It missed, crashed against the ceiling, came down with splintering glass and spilling liquid. Fumes spread chokingly over the room.

The fly landed again on the floor. Larger now! Expanding with a horribly rapid growth. Glora flung something—a little wooden rack with a few empty test-tubes in it. The rack struck the monstrous fly, but did not hurt it. The fly stood with hairy legs braced under its bulging body. Its multiple-lensed eyes were staring at the humans. And with its size must have come a sense of power, for it seemed to Alan that the monstrous insect had an abnormal alertness as it stood measuring its adversaries, gathering itself to attack them.

Only a few seconds had passed. Confused thoughts swept Alan. This fly with its growth would soon fill this room. Burst it; burst upward through a wrecked palace; soar out, and by the power of its size alone, devastate this world.

He heard himself shouting. "Father, get back! It's too

large! I've got to kill it!"

Launch himself upon it? Wrestle with it in a hand to hand combat? Alan edged around the center table. He was bathed in cold sweat. This thing so horrible! It was too large! Half the length of his own body, now. In a moment it might be twice that! He was aware of Glora pulling at him; and his father rushing past him with a bottle of liquid, and shouting:

"Alan! Run! You and this girl, get out of here! The other room—"

Then Alan saw the things upon the floor! His foot crushed one with a slippery squash! Nameless, hideous, noisome things grown monstrous, risen from their lurking invisibility in the drops of water!

Sodden, gray-black and green-slimed monsters of the deep; palpitating masses of pulp! One lay rocking, already as large as a football with streamers of ooze hanging upon it, and a black-ink fluid squirting; others were rods of red jelly-pulp, already as large as lead pencils, quivering, twitching. Germs of disease, these ghastly things, enlarging from the invisibility of

a drop of water!

The fly landed with a thud on the center table. The fumes of the shattered bottle of chemicals were choking Alan. He flung himself toward the monster fly, but Glora held him.

"No! Escape! The other room!"

Dr. Kent was stamping the things upon the floor; pouring acids upon them. Some eluded him. The air in the room was unbreathable....

They reached the bedroom. The laboratory was a hideous chaos. They were aware of its outer door opening, disclosing the figure of Polter who, undoubtedly, had been attracted by the noise. He shouted a startled oath. Alan heard it above the beating wings of the monster fly. Things lurched at the opened door; Polter banged it upon them and rushed away, shouting the alarm through the palace.

Dr. Kent was stammering, "Not the enlarging drug! Glora, child, the other! Hurry!"

Alan helped Glora with the opalescent vial. Things were lurching toward this room from the laboratory. Alan with averted face, choked by the incoming fumes, slammed the door upon the gruesome turmoil.

They took the diminishing drug. The bedroom expanded. The hideous sounds from the laboratory, and the whole palace now ringing with a wild alarm, then faded into the blessed remoteness of distance above them....

"I think it is this way, Alan. Off there—a doorway from my bedroom. Polter always kept it locked, but it leads into a corridor. We must get out of here. A crack under the door—is that it, off there?" Dr. Kent pointed into the gloomy blur of distance. "We are horribly small—it's so far to run—and I've lost my sense of direction."

The drug had ceased its action. The wooden floor of the room had expanded to a spread of cellular surface, ridged with broken, tube-like tunnels; pits and jagged cave-mouths. A knot-hole yawned like a crater a hundred feet away.

"We are too small," Glora protested hurriedly. "The door is where you say, Dr. Kent, but miles away."

With the other drug, the room contracted. The floor-surface shrank and smoothed a little. The door was distinguishable—a square panel several hundred feet in width and towering into the upper haze. The black line of the crack was visible along its bottom.

They ran to it. The top of the crack was ten feet above their heads. They ran under, across the wide intervening darkness toward a glow of light. Then they came from under the door into a corridor—and shrank against a cliff-wall as with a rush of wind and pounding tread the blurred shapes of a man's huge feet and legs rushed passed. The upper air was filled with rumbling shouts.

"We must chance it!" exclaimed Dr. Kent. "Too dangerous, so small! Larger—and if they see us, fight our way out!"

In the turmoil of the doomed palace no one noticed them. They cast aside all restraint. It was too

dangerous to wait. The excessive dose they took of the drug made the corridor shrink with dizzying speed. They rushed along its length. Alan hurled a little man aside who was in their path. Already they were larger than the Polter people.

They squeezed out of a shrinking doorway. The dwindling island was a turmoil. Little figures were plunging from the palace. At the edge of the water, Alan, Glora and Dr. Kent stood for an instant looking behind them. The palace was rocking! Its roof heaved upward then smashed and fell aside with the clatter of tumbling masonry. The monstrous fly, its hideous face mashed and oozing, reared itself up and, with broken, torn wings tried to soar away. But it could not. It slipped back. The drone and buzz of its fright sounded over the chaos of noise. Other things came lurching and twitching upward; slithering out....

The expanding body of the fly was pushing the palace walls outward. In a moment they collapsed and it emerged....

To Alan and his companions the scene was all

shrinking into a miniature chaos of horror at their shoe-tops. A diminuendo of screams mingled down there. Overhead were the stars, shining peacefully remote. Nearby lay a rapidly narrowing channel of shining water. A tiny city was across it. Lights were moving. The panic had spread from the island to Orena. Beyond the tiny city, a range of mountains showed; a cliff, gleaming in the starlight; tunnel mouths.

Suddenly against the stars off there, Alan saw the enlarging figure of Polter, his hunched shape unmistakable. He was facing the other way. He lunged and scrambled into a yawning black hole in the mountains. Polter was escaping! None of these people except himself had the drugs. He was escaping with the golden cage, out of this doomed atomic world to our Earth above.

Glora murmured, "There is our way out. Your way. And that is Polter going. I think he did not see us. So much is growing gigantic here." She clung to Alan. "Dear one—"

Dr. Kent muttered, "We will wait a moment—wade across—or leap over, and follow him out. Babs with him—dear God I hope so! This doomed realm!"

Alan held Glora close. And suddenly he was laughing—a madness, half hysteria. "Why, this, all this—why look, Glora, it's funny! This little world all excited, an ant-hill, outraged! Look! There's our giant sailboat!"

Down near their feet the inch-long sailboat stood at its dock. Tiny human figures were rushing for it; others, floundering in the water, were trying to climb upon it. Dr. Kent had stepped from the shore a foot or two, and tiny, lashing white rollers rocked the boat, almost engulfing it.

Alan's laugh rang out, "God! It's funny, isn't it? All those little creatures, so excited!"

"Steady, lad!" Dr. Kent touched him. "Don't let yourself laugh! A moment now, then we'll wade across. Polter won't have much start on us. We mustn't get too close to him in size, but try and attack him unawares. We have got to get Babs away from

him."

The narrowing passage rose hardly to their knees. They stepped ashore, well to one side of the toy city. Their growth had almost stopped. But suddenly Alan realized that Glora was diminishing! She had taken the other drug.

"Glora!"

"I must go back, Alan. This is my world, doomed perhaps, but I cannot forsake it now. I must give the enlarging drug to my father. And others who can rise and fight these monsters."

"Glora!"

Dr. Kent said hurriedly, "She's right, Alan. There is a chance they can save their city. For her to leave them would be dastardly."

She cried, "You go on up, Alan. You have enough of the drugs. Leave me, dear one—I am going back!"

"No!" he protested. "You must not! Or if you do, I'll come with you!"

She clung to him. He felt her body diminishing within his encircling arms. His love for her swept him—this girl who had cajoled Polter, or tricked him, stolen several of the little vials from him heaven knows how, and followed him up to the other world. This girl whom Alan now knew he loved, was leaving him. Forever?

As he stood there, with the miniature landscape at his feet in the wan starlight, the panic-stricken tiny city, the island with its monsters rising to overwhelm this microscopic world—it seemed to Alan then that if he let her go it was the end for him of all life's promised happiness.

"Alan, lad, come." His father was pulling at him. So horrible a choice! Alan thought that I was back on that island. But Babs, a prisoner in the golden cage, was with Polter, plunging upward in size. And his father was beside him, pleading.

"Alan—come—I can't get out alone. Nor save Babs. And the maddened Polter, with the power of this drug, can conquer and enslave our Earth as he has enslaved Orena—just one little city of one tiny golden atom! Believe me, lad, your duty lies above."

Glora's head was now down at Alan's waist. He stooped and kissed her white forehead; his fingers, just for an instant, smoothed her glossy hair.

"Good-by, Glora."

"Dear one, good-by."

She plunged away, and her tread as she dwindled mashed the forest behind the city. Alan and his father ran for the cliff. They were too large to squeeze into the little hole. But in a moment they made themselves smaller. They climbed as they dwindled; checked the drug action and rushed into the tunnel-mouth.

Alan stopped just for an instant to gaze out over the starlit scene. It was almost the same viewpoint from which he had his first sight of Glora's world only an

hour or two before. The distant island beyond the city showed plainly with the shining water around it. The vegetation there was growing! And there were dark, horribly formless blobs lurching outward and rising with monstrous bulk against the background of the stars!

"Alan! Come, lad!"

With a prayer for Glora trembling on his lips, Alan plunged into the dim phosphorescent gloom of the tunnel.

Chapter 10: The Escape

To Babs and me the ride in the golden cage strapped to Polter's chest as he made his escape outward into largeness was an experience awesome and frightening almost beyond conception. We heard the alarm in the palace on the island. Polter rushed to Dr. Kent's laboratory door, looked in, and in a moment banged it shut. Babs and I saw very little. We knew only that something horrible had happened; we could see only a blur with formless things in the void beneath our bars; and there were the choking fumes of chemicals surging at us.

Polter rushed through the castle corridor. We heard rumbling distant shouts.

"The drug is loose! The drug is loose! Monsters! Death for everyone!"

The room swayed with horrible dizzying lurches as Polter ran. We clung to the lattice bars, our legs and arms entwined. There were moments when Polter leaped, or suddenly stooped, and our reeling senses

all but faded.

"Babs! Babs, darling, don't let go! Don't lose consciousness!"

If she should be limp, here in this lurching room, her body to be flung back and forth across its confines—that would be death in a moment. I feared I could not hold her. I managed to get an arm about her waist.

"Babs!"

"I'm—all right, George. I can stand it. We're—he is enlarging."

"Yes."

I saw water far beneath us, lashed into a turmoil of foam with Polter's wading steps. There was a brief swaying vista of a toy city; starlight overhead; a lurching swaying miniature of landscape as Polter ran for the towering cliffs. Then he climbed and scrambled into the tunnel-mouth. Had he turned at that instant doubtless he would have seen the rising

distant figures of Glora, Alan and Dr. Kent. But he did not see them, evidently. Nor did we.

Polter spoke only very occasionally to Babs. "Hold tightly!" It was a rumbling voice from above us. He made no move to touch the cage, except that a few times the great blur of his hand came up to adjust its angle.

The lurching and jolting was less violent in the tunnel. Polter's frenzy to escape was subsiding into calmness. He traversed the tunnel with a methodical swinging stride. We were aware of him climbing over the noisome litter of the dead giant's body which blocked the tunnel's further end. We heard his astonished exclamations. But evidently he did not suspect what had happened, thinking only that the stupid messenger had miscalculated his growth and been crushed.

We emerged into a less dim area. Polter did not stop at the fallen giant. Nothing mattered now to him, quite evidently, save his own rapid exit with Babs from this atomic realm. His movements seemed calm,

yet hurried.

We realized now how different was an outward journey from the trip coming in. This was all only an inch of golden quartz! The stages upward were frequently only a matter of growth in size; the distances in this vast desert realm of golden rock always were shrinking. Polter many times stood almost motionless until the closing dwindling walls made him scramble upward into the greater space above.

It may have been an hour, or less. Babs and I, from our smaller viewpoint, with the landscape so frequently blurred by distance and Polter's movements, seldom recognized where we were. But I realized that going out was far easier in every way than coming in. Easier to determine the route, since usually the diminishing caverns and gullies made the upward step obvious.... We knew when Polter scrambled up the incline ramp.

It seemed impossible for us to plan anything. Would Polter make the entire trip without a stop? It seemed

so. We had no drugs. Our cage was barred beyond possibility of our getting out. But even if we had had the drugs, or had our door been open, there was no escape. An abyss of distance was always yawning beyond our lattice—the sheer precipice of Polter's body from his chest to the ground.

"Babs, we must make him stop. If he sits down to rest, you might get him to take you out. I must reach his drugs."

"Yes. I'll try it, George."

Polter was momentarily standing motionless as though gazing around him, judging what to do next. His size seemed stationary. Beyond our bars we could see the distant circular walls as though this were some giant crater-pit in which Polter was standing. Then I thought I recognized it—the round, nearly vertical pit into which Alan had plunged his hand and arm. Above us then was a gully, blind at one end. And above that, the outer surface, the summit of the fragment of golden quartz.

"Babs! I know where we are! If he takes you out, keep his attention. I'll try and get one of his black vials. Make him hold you near the ground. If I see you there, in position where you can jump, I'll startle him. Oh, Babs, dear, it's desperately dangerous but I can't think of anything else. Jump! Get away from here. I'll keep his attention on me. Then I'll join you if I can—with the drug."

Polter was moving. We had no time to say more.

"Yes! Yes, I'll try it, George." For just an instant she clung to me with her soft arms about my neck. Our love was sweeping us in this desperate moment, and it seemed that above us was a remote Earth world holding the promise of all our dreams. Or were we star-crossed, doomed like the realm of the atom? Was this swift embrace now marking the end of everything for us?

Babs called, "Dr. Polter?"

We could feel his movements stopping.

"Yes? You are all right, Babs?"

She laughed—a ripple of silvery laughter—but there was tragic fear in her eyes as she held her gaze on me. "Yes, Dr. Polter, but breathless. Almost dead, but not quite. What happened? I want to come out and talk to you."

"Not now, little bird."

"But I want to." To me it was a miracle that she could call so lightly and hold that note of lugubrious laughter in her voice. "I am hungry. Don't you think of that? And frightened. Take me out."

He was sitting down! "You remind me that I am tired, Babs. And hungry, also. I haf a little food. You shall come out for just a short time."

"Thank you. Take me carefully."

Our tilted cage was near the ground as he seated himself. But still it was too far for me to jump.

I murmured, "Babs—"

"Wait, George! I'll fix that. You hide! If he looks in he'll see you, where you are now!"

I scrambled back to my hiding place. Polter's huge fingers were fumbling at our bars. The little door sprang open.

"Come, Babs."

He held the cupped bowl of his palm to the doorway.
"Come out."

"No!" she called. "It is too far down!"

"Come. That iss foolish."

"No! I'm afraid. Put the cage on the ground."

"Babs!" His finger and thumb came reaching in to seize her, but she avoided them.

"Dr. Polter! Don't! You'll crush me!"

"Then come out on my hand."

He seemed annoyed. I had scrambled back to the doorway; I knew he could not see me so long as the cage remained strapped to his shirt front.

I whispered, "I can make it, Babs!"

Polter was apparently on one elbow, half turned on his side. From our cage, the sloping gleaming white surface of his stiff glossy shirt-bosom went down a steep incline. His belt was down there, and the outward bulging curve of his lap—a spreading surface where I could land like a scuttling insect, unobserved, if only Babs could hold his attention.

I whispered vehemently. "Try it! Go out! Leave me! Keep talking to him!"

She called instantly, "Very well, then. Bring your hand! Closer! Carefully! It seems so high up here!"

She swung herself to his palm, and flung her arms about the great pillar of his upcrooked finger. The

bowl of his hand moved slowly away. I heard her calling voice, and his overhead rumble.

I chanced it! I could not determine the exact position, or which way he was looking.

Again I heard Bab's voice. "Careful, Dr. Polter. Don't let me fall!"

"Yes, little bird."

I let myself down from the tilted doorway, hung by my hands and dropped. I struck the ramp-like yielding surface of his shirt-bosom. I slid, tumbling, scrambling, and landed softly in the huge folds of his trouser fabric. I was unhurt. The width of his belt, high as my body, was near me. I shrank against it; I found I could cling to its upper edge.

My hold came just in time. He shifted, and sat up. I was lifted with a swoop of movement. When it steadied I saw above me the top of his knee. His left leg was crooked, the foot drawn close to him. Babs was perched up there on the knee summit. His right

leg was outstretched. I was at the right side of his belt. I could dart off along that curving expanse of his leg and leap to the ground. If he would hold this position! One of the pouches of his belt was near me. The vial in it was black. The enlarging drug! I moved toward it.

But Babs was too high to jump from that summit of his crooked knee! I think she saw me at his belt. I heard her voice.

"I cannot eat up here. It is too high. Oh, please be careful how you move! I am so dizzy, so frightened! You move with such great jerks!"

He had what seemed a huge surface of bread and meat. He was breaking off crumbs to put before her. I reached the pouch of his belt. The vial was as long as my body. I tugged to try and lift it out.

All the giant contours of Polter's body shifted as he cautiously moved. I clung. I saw that Babs was being held gently between his thumb and forefinger. He lowered her to the ground, and she stood beside the

bread and meat he had placed there.

And she had the courage to laugh! "Why this—this is an enormous sandwich! You will have to break it."

He was leaning over her, half turned on his left side. The vial came free. I shoved it; but I could not control its weight. I pushed desperately. It slid over the round brink of his right hip, and fell behind him. I heard the tinkling thud of it down on the rocks.

There was no alarm. I could not chance leaping from his hip. I scurried along the convex top of his outstretched leg, and beyond his knee I jumped.

I landed safely. I could see the black vial back across the broken rock surface, with the bulge of Polter's hip above it. I ran back and reached the vial; tugged at its huge stopper. The cork began to yield under my panting, desperate efforts. In a moment I would have a pellet of the enlarging drug; make away with it; startle Polter so that Babs might dart off and escape.

The huge stopper of the vial was larger than my head.

It came suddenly out. I flung it away, plunged in my hand, and seized an enormous round pellet.

Then abruptly the alarm came, and I had not caused it! Polter ripped out a startled, rumbling curse and sat upright. Under the curve of his leg, I saw that Babs had been momentarily neglected. She was running.

Across the boulder-strewn plain, two tiny men had appeared. Polter had seen them.

They were the enlarging figures of Dr. Kent and Alan!

Chapter 11: The Combat of Size

The astounded Polter was taken wholly by surprise. He could have had no idea that anyone was following him. He thought he was alone with the tiny Babs in this rock-strewn metal desert. What he saw as he scrambled to his feet were four insect-size humans, two of them at a distance, and two within reach of him, and all of them scampering in different directions. The ground was littered with crags and boulders; was ridged and pitted, pock-marked, with tiny crater-holes and caves. The four scuttling figures almost instantly had disappeared from his sight.

I did not see where Babs went. I turned from the black vial of Polter's enlarging drug, and with the huge pellet under my arm I ran leaping over the rough ground and flung myself into a gully. I lay prone, flattened against a rock. In the murky distance of a pseudo-sky overhead, the monstrous head and shoulders of Polter were visible. I could see down to just below his waist. The empty cage with its door flapping open hung against his shirt-front. He had stooped to try and recover Babs. And instinctively his

hands went to his belt to seize his enlarging drug.

They were fumbling there now. He hauled out an opalescent vial of the diminishing element. But his black vial was gone. His frown spread into fear as he searched for it in the other compartments of his belt. I had thought that he had more than one black vial, but now it seemed not. His huge face was swept with the panic of terror. He flung a wild glance around him.

Through the open end of my gully I saw in the distance, miles away, the enlarging figure of Alan rising up. Then it ducked back of a distant rocky peak. Polter undoubtedly saw it. He was fumbling with his opalescent vial, and with confused panic upon him he made the mistake of taking the diminishing drug. And instantly seemed to regret it. His curse rumbled above me. His glance went down to the rocks at his feet, and there he saw lying his black vial with its stopper out. His body already was beginning to dwindle. He stooped, seized the vial, and took the enlarging drug. The shock of it made him stagger; momentarily he disappeared from my line of

vision but I could hear his panting breath and the unsteady pound of his footsteps.

I still held that huge round ball of the drug. I seized a loose stone and frantically knocked off a chunk—heaven knows how much, I do not. I shoved it into my mouth, chewed and hastily swallowed it. And with the lurching, swaying, shrinking gully closing in upon me, I ran to get out of its distant open end.

I was heading toward where Alan and his father were lurking. I came from the gully into the open, just as the walls closed behind me. The whole scene was a dizzying blurred sway of contracting movement. I saw that I was in a circular valley now some five miles in diameter, with its jagged enclosing walls rising sheerly perpendicular out of sight in the haze overhead.

Polter had staggered backward. I saw him a mile or so away. His back at that instant was turned to me. He was now no more than three or four times my own height. He scrambled against the valley cliff-wall as though trying to find a foothold to climb up it. He

went a little way, but fell back.

Near me, Alan and old Dr. Kent suddenly appeared. I was larger. They flung themselves at my knees. Alan gasped:

"You, George! You got Babs?"

"Yes—Babs is around somewhere! Stay down here! Don't lose her in size! Stay small! Search and—"

"But George—"

"I'll tackle Polter. I've taken—God, I don't know how much I've taken of the drug!"

They were shrinking down by my boot-tops. Alan shouted suddenly, "There's Babs! Thank God, there's Babs!"

She was too small; I could not see her, nor even hear her, though she must have been calling to them. Alan again screamed up at me with his little voice:

"She's here, George! You—go on and get Polter! I can't overtake you you—haven't enough of the drug!" His tiny voice was fading away. "Go on and get him, George! This time—get him—"

I swung with a staggering step around to face the open valley. It was shrunken now to barely half a mile of width. Its smooth walls rose some two or three thousand feet to an upper circular horizon with murky distance overhead. Polter stood across from me. He had tried to climb out but could not. He saw me and came lurching. We were a quarter of a mile from each other. I ran forward through a shifting scene of shrinking rock walls and crawling, contracting ground. Quarter of a mile? It seemed hardly more than a score of running strides before Polter loomed close ahead of me. He was still nearly twice my size. I stooped, seized a loose boulder, and flung it. I missed his face, but, as his hand went up carrying a bared knife-blade, by fortunate chance the stone struck his wrist. The knife dropped to the rocks. He stooped to recover it, but I was upon him. As I felt his huge arms go around me, half lifting me, my foot struck the

knife. But in an instant it was swept down into smallness beneath us as we expanded above it.

Both of us were unarmed in this combat of size. I was a half-grown youth in Polter's first grip upon me. I heard his panting words, grimly triumphant:

"This—George Randolph, I haf been—waiting for so many many years! The hunchback—takes his revenge—now—"

He lifted me. His great arms were horribly powerful, but I could feel them dwindling. I was enlarging faster. Just a few moments—if I could last a few moments!... My feet were off the ground, my chest close pressed against the little golden cage between us. He had a hand shoving back my head; his fingers sought my throat. I wound my legs around him, and then he tried to throw me down and fall upon me. But we had twisted and my back was to the cliff. The rocks were shoving at us, insistently pushing with almost a living movement. Polter staggered with me. His grip on my throat tightened, shutting off my breath. My senses whirled. His grim sardonic face

over me was blurred to my sight. I tore futilely at my throat to break his choking grip. All the world was a roaring chaos to my fading senses. Then in the blur I saw horror sweep his expression. His fingers involuntarily loosened. I got a breath of blessed air, gasping, and my sight cleared.

Walls were closing around us! We were in a pit barely ten feet wide, with the top a few feet above Polter's head. The nearer wall shoved us again. Our bodies almost filled the shrinking pit! Polter lurched and cast me off. I half fell, striking my shoulder against the opposite wall, and I saw Polter leap at the dwindling brink and scramble out.

I was nearly wedged. As I rose, the top of the pit only reached my waist. Polter had fallen on the upper ground, and was on hands and knees. Instead of standing up, he lurched at me; tried to shove me back. But I was out. I clutched at him. We were almost of a size now. We rolled on the ground, locked together; rolled to the brink of the pit and over it, as it shrank to a little round hole unnoticed beneath our threshing bodies!

At the side of the circular valley Alan and Dr. Kent crouched with the smaller figure of Babs between them. They saw Polter and me as two swaying gigantic forms locked in a death struggle, towering against the sky. Tremendous expanded bodies! They saw us come to grips; saw the great hunched Polter bend me backward, choking me.

Our bodies lurched. Our huge legs with a single step brought us to the center of the valley. It was a shrinking valley to Alan, Babs and Dr. Kent, for they too, were enlarging. But the fighting giant figures were growing faster. In only a moment their shoulders were up there in the sky, pressing against the narrowing cliff-walls.

Alan gasped. "But George will be crushed! Look at him!"

Horror swept them as they crouched watching. The enormous pillars of Polter's legs towered straight up from near at hand. Alan was aware of himself screaming:

"George—out! You're too large! Too large for in here!"

As though his microscopic voice could reach me—my head hundred of feet above him. But he screamed it again. This was all in a few horrible moments, though it seemed to the three watchers an eternity. Alan was helpless to aid me; they had taken all of the enlarging drug they had.

Then they saw Polter cast me off. I lurched and struck, with my shoulders wedged against the cliff directly over where they crouched. The overhead sky was darkened as Polter scrambled upward.

Alan was still screaming futilely, "George—up! Get out!"

Babs huddled with white, horrified face, staring. Then I went out after Polter. My disappearing legs were great dark blurs in the sky. Alan saw the valley now contracted to a thousand feet of width, with its cliffs equally as high. Then everything was smaller.... The sky overhead went dark again; from cliff to cliff a segment of our rolling bodies momentarily spanned

the opening.

And presently Alan realized that the valley had narrowed to a pit. He stood up. "Hurry! Now we can get out after them. Up there!"

The opening above was empty. Polter and I were fighting some distance away....

Dr. Kent was soon large enough to scramble out of the pit. Alan handed the little Babs up to him and followed. Alan saw that they were now in a long gully, blind at one end with a five hundred-foot perpendicular cliff. Against the wall, the titanic form of Polter stood at bay. And I was fronting him. The summit of the cliff was lower than our waists. Triumph swept Alan; he saw that I was the larger! As Polter bored into me my backward step crossed the full width of the gully. Alan shouted:

"Down! Babs—Father!"

They had barely time to flatten themselves in a narrow crevice between upstanding rocks before my

foot crashed down. For an instant the sole of my boot formed a flat black ceiling as it trod and spanned the rocks. Then it lifted; was gone with a blurred swoop. They saw the white blur of my hand come down and snatch a tremendous boulder, raising it with a great sweep of movement into the sky. They saw me crash it against Polter; but it only struck his shoulder. He roared with anger. The whole sky was roaring and rumbling with our shouts and our panting breathing, and the ground was clattering, pounding with our giant tread. Huge loose boulders were tumbled in an avalanche everywhere.

Again it seemed to Alan that our lurching, heedlessly surging bodies must be crushed within these contracting walls. Only our locked, intertwined legs were visible; our bodies were lost in the sky. Then it seemed to Alan that I had heaved Polter upward. And followed him. We disappeared. There was a distant overhead rumble, and the murky sky, with vague patches of far-distant illumination in it, became empty of movement....

The walls presently were again closing upon Alan and

his companions. They ran out of the open end of the shrinking little gully and came to a new upward vista....

I found myself a full head and shoulders taller than Polter. And he was tiring, panting heavily. His face was cut and bleeding from the blows of my fists. The rock I heaved struck his shoulder. He roared, head down, and bored into me. He was heavier than I. His weight flung me back. My foot slid on the loose stones of the gully floor. I did not know that Babs, Alan and their father were huddled under those stones!

My back struck the opposite wall. Polter's upflung knee caught me in the stomach, all but knocking the breath from me. He was desperate, oblivious to the closing walls. And as he flung his arms with a grip about my neck, hanging, trying to bear me down, I saw in his blazing dark eyes what seemed the light of suicide. I think that then, with a sudden frenzied madness he realized that he was beaten. And tried to pull us to the ground and let the walls crush us.

I summoned all my remaining strength and heaved us

forward. I broke his hold. His body was jammed back against a lowering wall. Its top seemed almost at our knees. I shoved frantically. He fell backward and I jumped after him.

We were on a great rocky plateau. But it was shrinking, crawling into itself. Spots of light were in the murk overhead; there seemed a distant circular horizon of emptiness around us.

Polter was lying in a heap. But it was trickery, for as I incautiously bent over him his hand crashed a rock against my head. I reeled, with all the world turning black, but did not fall. There was a horrible instant when my senses were going, but I fought to hold them. Blood from a wound on my forehead was streaming in my eyes. I was staggering. Then I realized I was grimly tossing my head, shaking the blood away; and little by little my sight came back.

Polter was on his feet, rushing me. His fist came with an upward swing at my chin, but I ducked my head aside at the last moment.

And suddenly, fighting up there in the open, my mind envisaged how gigantic we were! This was a great upland plateau, rounded with miles of distance and a shadowy, dimly radiant abyss beyond its circular horizon. And I was a thousand feet or more tall! A titan, looming here in the sky!...

My fist quite unexpectedly caught Polter's jaw. His simultaneous swing went wild, though I leaped backward from it. He staggered, and his arms dropped to his sides. I was crouched forward, guarded, watching him while I gasped for breath. There was the briefest of instants when an expression of vague surprise swept his face. But I had not knocked him out.

It was death overtaking him. His heart was yielding, overtaxed from this strain; and I think there at the last, he realized it. The blood drained suddenly from his face and lips, leaving them livid. I saw fear, then a wild horror in his eyes. He stood swaying. Then his knees gave way and he toppled. He fell from his height in the air where I stood gazing at him—fell forward on his face, his titanic length spread all

across the top of this rocky landscape!

For a moment I did not move. My head was reeling, my ears roaring. Blood streamed into my eyes. I wiped it away with a torn sleeve and stood panting, gazing at the glowing distance around me.

I was a titan, standing there. The body of Polter was shrinking at my feet. The circular abyss of emptiness came nearer as this rocky eminence contracted.

Suddenly my attention went to the sky overhead. Vague distant lights were there. Then a broad flat blur seemed spread over me. Light everywhere was growing. Beyond the nearby brink of the abyss was a white reflected radiance from beneath. Abruptly I realized there was a level, flat white plain running far off there in the distance.

Overhead a radiance contracted into a spot of light. A shape in the sky moved! I heard a far-away rumble—a human voice!

The body of Polter lay at my feet. It was hardly the

length of my forearm I stood, a titan.

And then, with a shock of realization, I saw how tiny I was! This was the broken top of that fragment of golden quartz the size of a walnut! I was standing there, under the lens of the giant microscope in Polter's dome-room laboratory, with half a dozen astounded Quebec police officials peering down at me!

Chapter 12: Mysterious Little Golden Rock

I need not detail the aftermath of our emergence from the atom. Dr. Kent and Babs followed me out within a few moments. But Alan was not with them! He had seen Polter fall. His father and Babs were safe. The sacrifice he had made in leaving Glora was no longer needed.

Down there on the rocky plateau, Dr. Kent suddenly realized that Alan was dwindling.

"Father, I must! Don't you understand? Glora's world is menaced. I can't leave her like this. My duty to you and Babs is ended. I did my best, Dad—you two are safe now."

"Alan! My boy!"

He was already down at Dr. Kent's waist, Bab's size. He held up his hand. "Dad, good-by." His rugged, youthful face was flushed, his voice choked. "You—you've been a mighty good father to me. Always."

Babs flung her arms about him. "Alan, don't!"

"But I must." He smiled whimsically as he kissed her.

"You wouldn't want to leave George, would you?"

Never see him again? I'm not asking you to do that, am I?"

"But, Alan—"

"You've been a great little pal, Babs. I'll never forget it."

"Alan! You talk as though you were never coming back!"

"Do I? But of course I'm coming back!" He cast her off. "Babs, listen. Father's upset. That's natural. You tell him not to worry. I'll be careful, and do what I can to save that little city. I must find Glora and—"

Babs was suddenly trembling with eagerness for him.

"Yes! Of course you must, Alan!"

"Find her and bring her out here! I'll do it! Don't you

worry." He was dwindling fast. Dr. Kent had collapsed to a rock, staring down with horror-stricken eyes.

Alan called up to Babs:

"Listen! Have George watch the chunk of gold-quartz. Have it guarded and watched day and night. Handle it carefully, Babs!"

"Yes! Yes! How long will you be gone, Alan?"

"Heavens—how do I know? But I'll come back, don't you worry. Maybe in only a day or two of your time."

"Right! Good-by, Alan!"

"Good-by," his tiny voice echoed up. "Good-by, Babs—Father!"

Babs could see his miniature face smiling up at her. She smiled back and waved her arm as he vanished into the pebbles at her feet.

The eyes of youth! They look ahead; they see all things so easily possible! But old Dr. Kent was

sobbing.

It has broken Dr. Kent. A month now has passed. He seldom mentions Alan to Babs and me. But when he does, he tries to smile and say that Alan soon will return. He has been very ill this last week, though he is better now. He did not tell us that he was working to compound another supply of the drugs, but we knew it very well.

And his emotion, the strain of it, made him break. He was in bed a week. We are living in New York, quite near the Museum of the American Society for Scientific Research. In a room of the biological department there, the precious fragment of golden quartz lies guarded. A microscope is over it, and there is never a moment of the day or night without an alert, keen-eyed watcher peering down.

But nothing has appeared. Neither friend nor foe—nothing. I cannot say so to Babs, but often I fear that Dr. Kent will suddenly die, and the secret of his drugs die with him. I hinted once that I would make a trip into the atom if he would let me, but it excited him so

greatly I had to laugh it off with the assurance that of course Alan will soon return safely to us. Dr. Kent is an old man now, unnaturally old, with, it seems, the full weight of eighty years pressing upon him. He cannot stand this emotion. I think he is despairingly summoning strength to work upon his drugs, fearful that he will not be equal to it. Yet more fearful to disclose the secret and unloose so diabolical a power.

There are nights when with Dr. Kent asleep, Babs and I slip away and go to the Museum. We dismiss the guard for a time, and in that private room we sit hand in hand by the microscope to watch. The fragment of golden quartz lies on its clean white slab with a brilliant light upon it.

Mysterious little golden rock! What secrets are there, down beyond the vanishing point in the realm of the infinitely small! Our human longings go to Alan and to Glora.

But sometimes we are swept by the greater viewpoint. Awed by the mysteries of nature, we realize how very small and unimportant we are in the

vast scheme of things. We envisage the infinite reaches of astronomical space overhead. Realms of largeness unfathomable. And at our feet, everywhere, are myriad entrances into the infinitely small. With ourselves in between—with our fatuous human consciousness that we are of some importance to it all!

Truly there are more things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy!

INVISIBLE EYES

An invisible eye that can see in the dark and detect the light of a ship two miles away on a black foggy night was introduced to newspaper men recently by its inventor, John Baird of television fame. He calls the invention "Noctovisor."

It looks like a large camera and can be mounted on a ship or airplane. It was announced that it would soon be tried on trans-Atlantic liners. For the

demonstration it was mounted in the garden of Baird's cottage, overlooking the twinkling lights of Dorking. In the dark beyond those lights an automobile headlight three miles away pointed toward the cottage.

At a signal from the inventor a sheet of ebonite, as a substitute for a supposed fog, two miles thick, was placed in front of the headlight. Not a glimmer was then visible to the human eye, but it appeared on the noctovisor screen as a bright red disc. It was supposed to have particular value in permitting a navigator in a fog to tell the exact direction of a beacon and to estimate roughly its distance.

The device is a combination of camera lens, television transmitter and television receiver. The lens throws a distant image on the exploring disc of the transmitter, through which it acts on a photo-electric cell sensitive to invisible infra-red rays. The receiver amplifies it for the observer.

MOON ROCKETS

Seventeen years of experimenting on a rocket designed by Prof. Albert H. Goddard of Clark University, to shriek its way from the earth to the moon, came to a glorious climax recently in an isolated and closely guarded section of Worcester when the rocket tore its flaming way through the air for a quarter-mile with a roar heard for a distance of two miles.

Prof. Goddard said the rocket was shot out of its cradle, careened through the air a mass of flame, and landed about where it was directed to land, beyond the Auburn town line. Test of a new propellant was the object of his demonstration, Prof. Goddard said.

Two or three times a week a small rocket goes up into the air a short distance, not enough to attract great attention. But the latest was a nine-foot rocket, shot out of a forty-foot tower. Near the tower is a safety post built of stone, with slits for peepholes. The experimental party stepped into the safety zone when the rocket was started.

The forty-foot tower is built much like an oil well derrick. Inside it are two steel rails to fill grooves in the rocket. These guide the rocket much as rifling in a gun barrel guides a bullet. Prof. Goddard, when teaching at Princeton in 1912, evolved the idea of shooting a rocket to the moon by means of successive charges of explosive much as the new German rocket motor racers are powered. In this most recent experiment he used a new powder mixture.

Prof. Goddard issued a statement after the demonstration, which said:

"My test was one of a series of experiments with rockets using an entirely new propellant. There was no attempt to reach the moon or anything of such a spectacular nature. The rocket is normally noisy, possibly enough to attract considerable attention. The test was thoroughly satisfactory, nothing exploded in the air, and there was no damage except possibly that incidental to landing."

75 Terrors Unseen by Harl Vincent

One after another the invisible robots escape Shelton's control—and their trail leads straight to the gangster chief Cadorna.

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

lisa screamed suddenly



Something about the lonely figure of the girl caused Edward Vail to bring his car to a sudden stop at the side of the road. When first he had glimpsed her off there on that narrow strip of rock-bound coast he was mildly surprised, for it was a desolate spot and seldom frequented by bathers so late in the season. Now he was aroused to startled attention by the unnatural posture of the slender body that had just been erect and outlined sharply against the graying September sky. He switched off the ignition and sprang to the ground.

Bent backward and twisted into the attitude of a contortionist, the little figure in the crimson bathing suit was a thing at which to marvel. No human being could maintain that position without falling, yet the girl did not fall to the jagged stones that lay beneath her. She was rigid, straining. Then suddenly her arm waved wildly and she screamed, a wild gasping cry that died in her throat on a note of despairing terror. It seemed that she struggled furiously with an unseen power for one horrible instant. Then the tortured body lurched violently and collapsed in a pitiful

quivering heap among the stones.

Eddie Vail was running now, miraculously picking his way over the treacherous footing. The girl had fainted, no doubt of that, and something was seriously wrong with her.

A mysterious mechanical something whizzed past; something that buzzed like a thousand hornets and slithered over the rocks in a series of metallic clanks. Then it was gone—or so it seemed in the confusion of Eddie's mind; but he had seen nothing. Probably a fantasy of his overworked brain, or only the surf breaking against the sea wall. He turned his attention to the girl.

She was moaning and tossing her head, returning painfully to consciousness. He straightened her limbs and placed his folded coat under the restless head, noting with alarm that vicious red welts marred the whiteness of her arms and shoulders. It was as if she had been beaten cruelly; those marks could never have resulted from her fall. Poor kid. Subject to fits of some sort, he presumed. She was a good looker, too,

and no mistake. He smoothed back the rumpled mass of golden hair and studied her features. They were vaguely familiar.

Then she opened her eyes. Stark terror looked out from their ultra-marine depths, and her lips quivered as if she were about to cry. He raised her to a more comfortable position and supported her with an encircling arm. She did cry a little, like a frightened child. Then, with startling abruptness, she sprang to her feet.

"Where is it?" she demanded.

"Where's what?" Eddie was on his feet, peering in all directions. He remembered the queer sounds he had heard or imagined.

"I—I don't know." The girl passed a trembling hand before her eyes as if to wipe away some horrifying vision. "Perhaps it's my imagination, but I felt—it was just as real—one of father's iron monsters. Beating me; bending me. I'd have snapped in a moment. But nothing was there. I—I'm afraid...."

Eddie caught her as she swayed on her feet. "There now," he said soothingly, "you're all right, Miss Shelton. It's gone now, whatever it was." Iron monsters! In a flash it had come to him that this girl he held in his arms was Lina Shelton, daughter of the robot wizard. No wonder she was afflicted with hallucinations! But those bruises were real, as was the forcible twisting of her lithe young body. And he *had* heard something.

"You know me?" The girl was calmer now and faced him with a surprised look.

"Yes, Miss Shelton. At least I recognize you from the pictures. Society page, you know. And I'm Edward Vail—Eddie for short—on vacation and at your service."

The girl smiled wanly. "You know of father's break with Universal Electric? Of his private experiments?"

"I heard of the scrap and of how he walked out on the outfit, but nothing further." Eddie thought grimly of how nearly he had come to losing his own job when David Shelton broke relations with his employers. He

had been too enthusiastic in support of some of the older man's claims.

"It's been terrible," the girl whispered. She clung nervously to his arm as he picked the way back to the road. "The loneliness, and all. No servants will stay out here now, and father spends all of his time in the laboratory. Then—this fear of the mechanical men—they haunt me. I—I guess they've got me a little goofy."

Eddie laughed reassuringly. "Perhaps," he suggested, "you will let me help you. Your father, I believe, will remember me, and I'll be very glad to—"

"No, no!" The girl seemed frightened at the thought. "I'm sure he wouldn't welcome you. He's changed greatly of late and is suspicious of everyone, even keeping things from me. But it's awfully nice of you to offer your assistance, and you've been a perfect peach to take care of me this way. I—I'd better go now."

They had reached the road and Eddie looked uncertainly at his roadster. He hated to think of

leaving the girl in this lonely spot. She was obviously in a state of extreme nervous tension and, to him, seemed pathetically helpless, and afraid.

"That the house?" he asked, pointing in the direction of the gloomy old mansion whose dilapidated gables were barely visible over the tree tops.

"Yes." The girl shivered and drew closer to him.

The ensuing silence was broken by the slam of a door. His car! Eddie looked toward it in amazement; he was hearing things again. The springs sagged on the driver's side as under the weight of a very heavy occupant, but the seat was empty. Then came the whine of the starter and the motor purred into life. The gears clashed sickeningly and the car was jerked into the road with a violence that should have stripped the differential. He pulled the girl aside just as it roared past and disappeared around the bend in a cloud of dust. The sound of the exhaust died away rapidly and left them staring into each other's eyes in awed silence.

David Shelton was prowling around in the shrubbery when they approached the house—a furtive, unkempt creature whom Eddie would hardly have recognized. He straightened up and peered at his daughter's companion with obvious disapproval.

"Lina," he said severely, "I've told you we want no visitors."

"Yes, Dad, I know, but Mr. Vail's car was stolen out in front and there is no way for him to go on. We must look after him."

"His car—stolen? Who stole it?" David Shelton drew close and glared suspiciously at his unwelcome visitor.

"One of your monsters, I think," she replied shakily, "though we could see nothing. And the same thing attacked me and beat me. Look at my bruises!"

Shelton was examining the marks, and his fingers trembled as he touched his daughter's shoulder. He looked piteously into her eyes. "Are you sure, Lina?"

Sure? Did you see it?"

"No, no. But I felt and heard—the iron arms and the clamps and the buzzing. Oh, it was horrible!" The girl's voice rose hysterically.

"Oh, Lord! What have I done?" groaned Shelton. "It's true, then. Lina, listen: I've succeeded in making them invisible, and one got away this morning. But I thought—I thought—" He looked at Eddie, remembering his presence suddenly. "But I'm talking too much. It seems to me I remember having seen you before, young man."

"You have, sir," Eddie stated. "In the research laboratory of Universal Electric. I work with Borden."

"They've sent you to find me?" Shelton stiffened perceptibly.

"Indeed, not, sir. I'm on vacation and was merely passing by when I saw your daughter in danger, a danger I still do not understand."

"Yes, and he helped me to the road," Lina interposed, "and then lost his car at the hands of—"

"Silence!" the father thundered. But his eyes fell before the fire that instantly flashed in those of the girl.

"Now, you listen to me!" she returned angrily, "I've stayed on here with you until I'm nearly crazy with your everlasting puttering and experimenting—hearing your uncanny machines walking around in the middle of the night—seeing impossible sights—then, this thing I couldn't see but could feel. And you've gotten into such a state that you'll go crazy yourself, if you continue. Something's got to be done, I tell you. I can't stand it!"

Her voice broke on a choked sob.

"But Lina—"

"Don't but me, Father. I mean it. Mr. Vail discovered your hideout quite by accident and he's been very nice to me. I tell you he means no harm and I want

him to stay. If you're not decent to him, if you send him away, I swear I'll go too. I will—I will!"

Shelton's eyes misted and something of the hardness left his expression. A look of haunting fear took its place and he stared pleadingly at Eddie.

"Br-r! I'm cold!" Lina exclaimed irrelevantly. "And—and I believe I'm going to cry." She turned away and raced for the shelter of the gloomy old house without another word.

Eddie turned inquiring eyes on his unwilling host.

"Just like her mother before her," Shelton muttered softly. Then he faced the younger man squarely and his shoulders straightened. "Mr. Vail," he said sheepishly, "I've been a fool and I ask your pardon. But Lina doesn't know. There's something tremendous behind all this, something that's gotten beyond me. I'll send her away for her own safety, but I must stay on. If—if only there was someone I could trust—"

"You can trust me, sir," Eddie stated simply.

The older man paced the ground nervously, and Eddie could see that he was under a most severe mental strain. Several times he halted in his tracks and peered anxiously at his guest. Then he seemed to make a sudden decision.

"Vail," he said sharply, "I need help badly. I want you to stay, if you will. You swear you'll not reveal what I am about to show you?"

"I swear it, sir."

"You'll not report to Universal?"

"Never."

They surveyed each other appraisingly. Eddie was mystified by the happenings of the day and was curious to learn more concerning these mythical invisible creations. It was inconceivable that the scientist had spoken truly of his accomplishment. Yet, he had done some marvelous things with Universal and, maybe—well, anyway, there was the girl.

"Come with me," Shelton was saying: "I believe you're a square shooter, Vail." He was leading the way along the gravel path at the side of the house. Before them loomed the squat brick building that was the laboratory.

The door crashed open before Shelton's hand had reached the knob, and one of those buzzing, unseen, monstrosities rushed clanking by, knocking the scientist from his feet in its passage. Ponderous, speeding footsteps crunched the gravel of the path, and then, with a wild thrashing of the underbrush alongside, the thing was gone.

Eddie bent over the prostrate man and saw that he was unconscious. A thin trickle of blood ran from a cut in the side of his head.

"Lina! Lina!" called Eddie frantically. For the first time in his life he was genuinely frightened.

He half carried, half dragged the limp body through the door of the laboratory and propped it in a chair. It required but a moment for him to see that Shelton's

injury was inconsequential. He had only been stunned and already showed signs of recovering.

"What is it, Mr. Vail? What's happened?" came the voice of Lina Shelton breathlessly. She was framed in the doorway, dressed now and panting from her exertions in responding to his call. "Oh, it's father," she wailed, dropping to her knees at his side. "He's been hurt. Badly, too."

"No, not badly, Miss Shelton. He'll be around in a minute. I'm sorry to have excited you, but when I called I feared it was worse than it is." He was washing the blood from her father's small wound as he spoke.

She took the basin from his hand, spilling some of the water in her eagerness. "Here, let me have that cloth," she demanded.

Eddie admired her as her deft fingers took up the task. She was as exquisite in a simple sport outfit as she had been in her bathing suit.

The scientist opened his eyes after a moment. Remembrance came at once and he sat erect in the chair, staring.

"Lina!" he exclaimed, grasping her hand conclusively. "You're here, thank God! I dreamed—oh, it was horrible—I dreamed they had you." He clung to her closely.

"They?" she murmured inquiringly.

"Yes. Two of them are loose now. It's danger for you, my dear. You must leave at once. No, no—I can't let you out of my sight until they are captured or destroyed." He rose to his feet in his agitation and shook his head to clear it. He looked pleadingly at Eddie as if expecting him to offer a solution of the difficulty.

"Vail!" he exploded, then, pointing a shaking forefinger at an elaborate short-wave radio transmitter which occupied a corner of the large room. "I ask you to bear witness. That is the source of energy for these creations of mine and it's shut down.

How on earth can they keep going? I ask you."

"Perhaps someone else, sir," Eddie suggested doubtfully. "Have you any enemies who might be able to duplicate the impulses of that apparatus?"

"Bah! Enemies, yes—with Universal—but none who could duplicate the complicated frequencies I use. My secrets are my own. I've never even put them on paper."

Eddie was examining the intricate apparatus. "You knew of the first one's escape, didn't you?" he asked. "How did it happen?"

Shelton again became the enthusiastic scientist. "Here," he said, "I'll show you and you can judge for yourself." He strode to the gleaming figure of a seven-foot robot of startlingly human-like appearance.

Lina let forth an exclamation of repugnance and fear.

"No, Mr. Shelton," Eddie objected. "The same thing will occur again. Then there will be three."

"We'll fix that, my boy." The scientist was removing cover plates from the hip joints of the mechanical man. "I'll disconnect the cables that feed the locomotors. He *can't* walk then."

Eddie was still doubtful but dared offer no further objection, especially since Lina Shelton was watching in wide-eyed silence. He examined the monster and saw that it was quite similar in outside appearance to those supplied by Universal for heavy manual labor, excepting that this one was armed as were those used for prison guards. There were the same articulated limbs and the various clamps and hooks for lifting and heavy hauling; the tentacles for grasping; machine guns front and back. Under the helical headpiece that was the antenna this robot seemed to have two eyes—a new feature—but closer examination showed these to be the twin lenses of a stereoscopic motion picture camera. This robot, then, could see. Or at least it could record what the lenses saw for its masters.

"There," Shelton grunted when he had finished his tinkering, "he's paralyzed from the waist down. Let this one try and get away from us."

"Guns aren't loaded, are they?" Eddie asked.

"Lord, no! Never have any of them loaded. That *would* be a fool stunt." Shelton had pulled the starting handle of a motor-generator and its rising whine accompanied his words.

The vacuum tubes of the transmitter glowed into life and the scientist manipulated the controls rapidly. Lina was watching the robot with fascinated awe. Its arms moved in obedience to the controls, tentacles waved and coiled; the humming of its internal mechanisms filled the room. The locomotion controls had no effect, as the scientist had predicted. Eddie drew a sigh of relief.

"Now, Vail, watch," Shelton exulted. "I'll show you what I was doing with the first one." He closed a switch that lighted another bank of vacuum tubes behind the control panel.

"You can make this one invisible?" Eddie asked incredulously.

"Certainly—from the waist up. This ought to be good."

"Mind telling me the principle?"

"Not at all—now. I've your promise of secrecy. It's a simple matter, Vail, really. Just a problem of wave motions—light. Invisible light; the ultra-violet, you know. My robots are built of specially alloyed metals which permit great freedom of molecular vibration. The insulating materials and even the glass of the camera lenses are possessed of the same property. Get it? I merely set up a wave motion in the atoms of the material that is in synchronism with the frequency of ultra-violet light, which is invisible to the human eye. All visible colors are absorbed, or more accurately, none are reflected excepting the ultra-violet. Perfect transparency is obtained since there is neither refraction nor diffraction of the visible colors. And there you are!"

Eddie stared at the upper half of the robot and saw that it was changing color as Shelton tuned the transmitted wave. Then suddenly it was gone. The entire upper portion of the mechanism had vanished;

had just snuffed out like the flame of a candle. He could see down into the tops of the thing's hollow legs. Shelton laughed at him as he stretched forth his hand and hesitatingly felt for the invisible mid-section and upper body. It was there all right, unyielding and cold, that metal body. But no trace of it was visible to the eye. He drew back his fingers as if they had touched a hot stove. The thing was positively uncanny.

"Dad! Turn it off—please," Lina begged. "It's getting on my nerves. Please!"

Obligingly, Shelton pulled the switch. "Now you'll see," he said to Eddie, "whether the same thing happens. Watch."

Mistily at first, the outlines of the monster's torso and arms came into view, semi-transparent but clouding rapidly to opacity. Then it glinted with the barely visible violet, a solid once more, rigid and motionless. It was a lifeless mechanism, for the source of its energy had been cut off. Eddie had an almost irresistible impulse to pinch himself.

Then he gasped audibly, as did Shelton, for the thing snuffed out of sight again without warning, and the hum of its many motors resumed. There came a terrific clanking as it waved arms and tentacles and violently threshed with its upper body. But the visible portion, its legs, remained rooted to the floor of the laboratory. Lucky it was that the scientist had disconnected those wires; lucky too that the machine guns were empty of ammunition.

"There now—see?" Shelton's voice rose excitedly. "It's been no fault of mine. The power is off but it moves—it moves. What on earth do you suppose—"

Eddie's shout interrupted him. He had seen something at the window: a face pressed against the pane and contorted with unutterable malice. Then it was gone. With the shout of warning still in his throat, Eddie bounded through the door in pursuit of the intruder. Lina's cry of recognition followed him into the twilight. "Carlos!" she had called.

He saw a stocky figure slink around the corner of the laboratory and make for the underbrush beyond. In a

flash he was after him. No, he thought grimly, Shelton hadn't any enemy clever enough to duplicate his transmitter! The hell he didn't! Who the devil was this fellow Carlos anyway? He tore savagely at the impeding branches as he plunged deeper and deeper into the thicket.

It was a fruitless chase and Eddie soon retraced his steps to the laboratory. Swell mess he'd gotten himself into! His car was gone: probably wrapped around a tree by this time. And here was a situation that spelled real danger, a thing with which Shelton was utterly unable to cope. As a matter of fact, he was so impractical—such a visionary cuss, after the fashion of all geniuses—that he'd never be convinced of the seriousness of the matter until it was too late. What to do? The girl was a corker, though, and game as they made 'em. Just the sort a fellow could tie to....

Lina's firm clear voice came to him through the open door of the laboratory. "Dad," she was saying, "why don't you give it up? Let's go back to New York where it is safe for you and for me. Let the things go and forget about them. What do they amount to, after all?

We've plenty of money and you already have earned enough fame to last the rest of your life. Come on now—please—for me."

"What do they amount to?" Shelton reiterated, his voice rising querulously. "Lina, it's the most tremendous thing I've ever done. Think for a moment of what my robots could accomplish in the next war. And there'll be a next war as sure as you're alive. Think of it! No sending of our young manhood into the bloody fields of battle; no manning of our air fleets with the cream of our youth; no bloodshed on our side whatsoever. Instead, these robots will fight the war. They'll fight other robots too, no doubt, but the property of invisibility will be an invincible weapon. It will be a war that will end war once and for all. You can't—"

"Nonsense, Father," the girl returned sharply. "You've let your enthusiasm run away with your judgment. See what's happened already?—someone's figured it out before you've even perfected the thing. An enemy of our country could do the same in wartime. Maybe it's a foreign spy who has done what's been done to-

day."

Eddie walked into the laboratory. "Couldn't find him," he announced briefly.

"No difference," said Shelton. "He doesn't count in this. We called to you when you rushed out, but couldn't make you hear."

"Who is he?" Eddie asked shortly. What he had overheard made him more than ever impatient with the older man. So clever and yet so dense, Shelton was.

Lina avoided his gaze.

"Only Carlos—Carlos Savarino," said Shelton, carelessly, "a Chilean, I think. He worked for me for two months during the summer and I fired him for getting fresh with Lina. Good mechanic, but dumb as an ox. Had to tell him every little detail when he was doing something in the shop. I'd have saved time if I'd done it myself."

The girl looked at Eddie squarely now. She was flushing hotly. "And I horsewhipped him," she added.

"Yes," Shelton laughed; "it was rich. He sneaked away like a whipped puppy, and this is the first time we've seen him since."

Eddie whistled. "And you think he doesn't count in this?" he asked.

"Of course not. Too dumb, I tell you. Doesn't know the first principles of science. He thinks the only wave motion is that of the ocean." Shelton chuckled over his own jest.

"I wouldn't be too sure," Eddie snapped. "And I want to tell you something, Mr. Shelton. Through no fault of my own, I heard some of your conversation with Li—with your daughter, before I returned here. I was puzzled over your reasons for working so absorbedly on this thing, but now I know them and I think you're wasting your time and keeping your daughter in needless danger."

"You dare talk to me like this!" Shelton roared.

"I do, sir, and you'll thank me later." Eddie returned the older man's glare with one equally savage.

Lina's gurgle of laughter broke the tension. "He's right, Dad, and you know it," she interposed. "Let him finish."

Eddie needed no such encouragement, though it warmed his heart. And Shelton listened respectfully when he continued, "I'm into this now, sir, and I intend to see it through to the end. I'll keep your secret, too, though I doubt if it'll ever be of much value to you. Know what I think? I think this Carlos is a damn clever fellow instead of the ass you took him to be. He probably just pretended he was ignorant of science. Why shouldn't he? That way he got a liberal education from you in the very things he wanted to find out. Since you tied the can to him he's had plenty of chances to build a duplicate of your control apparatus—with the aid of some foreign government, no doubt—and now they've stolen two of your machines to complete the job. Your secret already is

out and in the very hands you've tried to keep it from."

Shelton paled visibly as Eddie talked. "But—but how—" he stammered.

"How should I know how they did it?" the younger man countered. "Here—let's take a look around. I'll bet they've left their trail right here in this room."

He walked from one end of the laboratory to the other, peering into corners and under work benches as he passed. Shelton trailed him like a shadow, squinting through the square lenses of his spectacles.

They carefully avoided the partially invisible robot, for the humming of its upper motors continued and clanking sounds occasionally issued from the unseen upper portion. The enemies of David Shelton were still at work on their hidden controls.

"Here—what's this?" Eddie exclaimed suddenly, pointing out a glinting object in a dark corner of the laboratory.

Shelton examined it closely, looking over his shoulder. The object he had located seemed to be a mounted and hooded lens, a highly polished glass of about two inches diameter with its mounting attached rigidly to the wall.

"Never saw that before," Shelton stated with conviction. "And—why—it looks like an objective such as those used in the latest automatic television transmitters."

"Just what it is," Eddie grunted. He picked up a pinch bar from a nearby tool rack and drove its end through the glass as he spoke the words.

A violent wrench tore the thing loose and broke away a section of the thin plastered wall. There, in the cleverly concealed cavity behind, was revealed the mechanism of the radio "eye." Somewhere, someone had been watching their every move. And abruptly the thrashings of the robot ceased and its upper portion again became visible.

"Well," said David Shelton. "Well! Looks as if you're

right, young man. I'm astonished." His watery eyes looked sheepishly over the rims of his glasses.

Lina watched their every move. She seemed to sense the seriousness of the situation far more than did her father.

Then the lights went out. It had darkened to night outside and the blackness and silence in the laboratory was like that of a tomb.

"They've cut the wires," Eddie whispered hoarsely. "Got any weapons here, Shelton?"

"Yes. A couple of automatics. I'll get them." The scientist was no coward, anyway. His whispered words came calmly through the silence.

Eddie heard him shuffle a few steps and fumble with a drawer of the desk. In a moment the cold hard butt of a pistol was thrust into his hand. It had a comforting feel.

"Stay here with Lina," he commanded. "I'll go out and

see if I can find them. This looks nasty to me."

"No," came the girl's voice, "I'm going too."

"You are not," Eddie hissed. "You'll stay here or I'll know the reason. It's dark as a pocket outside and my eyes are as good as theirs. I'll get 'em if they're around here. You hear me?"

"Yes," she whispered meekly.

Edward Vail, only that morning headed for rest and quiet, was now out in the night, stalking an unknown and vicious enemy. And—for what? As he asked himself the question, the smile of Lina seemed to answer him from the blackness. *Cherchez la femme!* He was getting dotty as he neared his thirties. Maybe it was the hard work that had affected his mind.

The black hulk of the old house loomed against the scarcely less dark sky. There was no moon, and in only one tiny portion of the heavens were the stars visible. Mighty few of them at that. The swish-swish of the surf came to his ears faintly. Or was it someone

creeping along the wall of the house? He held his breath and waited.

They wouldn't use the robots at night. Couldn't follow their movements in the televue, if such an attachment had been built into their control transmitter. No, the devils would be here in person.

A muttered Teutonic curse sounded close at hand. That wouldn't be Carlos. God! Were the heinies mixed up in this thing? Just like 'em to be swiping a new war machine; but hadn't they gotten enough in 1944? Without warning he was catapulted from his feet by the impact of a heavy body. He struck the ground so violently that the pistol was jarred from his hand. Disarmed before the fight had started!

Then he was rolling over and over, battling desperately with an assailant who was much larger and heavier than himself. He was dazed and weakened from his initial dive to the hard ground. All rules of boxing and wrestling were forgotten. Biting, kicking, gouging, all were the same to this silent and powerful antagonist. It was catch-as-catch-can in the

darkness, and mostly the other fellow could and did. He had a grip like the clamp of a robot. Trying to dig out one of his eyes? Eddie saw stars—and lashed out with all his might, his flying fists playing a tattoo on the others ribs. Short arm jabs that brought grunts of agony from his big assailant. Try to blind him, would he?

Eddie somehow managed to get on top; his clutching fingers found the other's collar. Then he let loose with terrific rights and lefts that smacked home to head and face. Those outlanders don't like the good old American fist, and Eddie had room to bring them in from way back, now. The fellow had ceased struggling and Eddie's hands were getting slippery. Blood! Must be, for the stuff was warm and sticky. He rested for a moment, breathing heavily. The other was quiet beneath him—knocked cold. He staggered to his feet triumphantly; wondered how many more of them there were.

He looked around in the darkness, straining his eyes in vain to pierce its thick veil. There was a glimmer of light over there, through a window. The laboratory!

The light flickered a second and vanished. A cold fear gripped him and he stumbled through the grounds blindly, finally colliding painfully with the brick wall. He felt his way toward the door, or where he thought it should be.

He dared not call out for fear the others would hear. Where was that damned door? He rested again and listened. Not a sound was to be heard from within or without. He clawed his way frantically along the unsympathetic wall. It was a mile wide, that laboratory of Shelton's. Ah—at last! Weakly, he staggered within.

"Lina!" he whispered, "Lina! Shelton!"

There was no reply. He fumbled for a match. Funny how slowly his mind worked ... thoughts coming jerkily like a sound film running at quarter speed ... fingers shaking so he could scarcely strike a light. The flare showed the laboratory empty of human beings ... Lina gone ... that crazy robot ... quiet now, and visible ... but grinning at him ... then darkness....

What a headache! Eddie rolled over and groaned. Astounded by the hardness of his bed and the stiffness of his joints, he roused to instant wakefulness; sat up and stared. Where the devil was he? The laboratory—Shelton's—Lina. He jumped to his feet. Dawn was breaking and its first faint radiance lighted the robot with eery shifting colors. He berated himself: he'd passed out.

He dashed through the door and made a wild circuit of the grounds. Empty! No—there was his automatic, where it had fallen. Blood stains on the grass showed where the encounter had taken place last night. Must have smashed the Dutchman's nose. But he was gone. Everybody was gone. He rushed into the house and from room to room, upstairs and down. The place was deserted.

This was something to think about. Not an automobile around, no neighbors, not even a telephone. When Shelton went into seclusion, he did it thoroughly. Eddie returned to the laboratory and hunched himself in the scientist's chair. Maybe he could think better here.

They had Shelton and his daughter, all right. Kidnapped them. There was probably some detail of his discovery they couldn't dope out, and had decided to force him into telling them. The devils would use Lina's safety as a threat to force him into anything. Horrible, that thought. And Carlos already had made advances to her.

Startled by a sharp click, he turned around. The robot was whirring into life. Fast workers, whoever Shelton's enemies were, and up early! He found the pinch bar with which he had wrecked the television apparatus and, with a few mighty blows, destroyed the antenna and headpiece of the mechanical man. They'd not pull off any devilment with this one, anyway.

A wave meter on one of the benches attracted his attention and he twirled its knob. It gave strong indication at one and a half meters. The wave length of their control transmitter! If only he could find—but there it was: a direction finder. Hastily, he lighted its tubes and tuned to the frequency shown by the meter. He rotated the loop over the compass dial and

carefully noted maximum and minimum signals. He had a line on the transmitter! And it must be close by, for the intensity of the carrier wave was tremendous.

Slipping the automatic into his pocket, he left the laboratory and struck out through the underbrush in the direction Carlos had taken the day before.

Fighting his way through the tangled shrubbery, he kept his eyes constantly on the needle of the magnetic compass he had wrenched from the direction finder. It was tough going through the thicket, and just as bad across a swampy clearing where he was mired to the knees before he got across. Up the hill and into the woods he forged, keeping doggedly to the direction he had determined. This was rough country, less than a hundred miles from New York but uncultivated and unsettled excepting for the few summer places along the shore. He'd heard that these backwoods were infested with rum-runners and hijackers, a cutthroat gang.

There was a cabin off there through the trees, almost on the line he was following. Must be what he was looking for. He advanced cautiously, creeping

stealthily from tree to tree.

Voices came to his ears, and the throb of a motor-generator. It was the place, all right. He crept closer, and, circling the house, saw that an almost impassable road led to it from the rear. A heavy limousine was parked there in the trees, and another car, a yellow roadster—his own. A feeling of grim satisfaction was quickly dispelled by the sound of a familiar humming. Within a foot of his ear, it seemed to be, and instinctively he ducked.

Click! A powerful clamp had fastened itself to his wrist. One of Shelton's invisible robots! He struck blindly at the unseen monster and was rewarded by a shooting pain up his wrist as one of his knuckles was driven backward by the impact with the hard metal. Bands of writhing metal encompassed his body, pinning his arms to his side and lifting him bodily from the ground. There he hung, kicking and struggling in mid-air, supported by nothing he could see. He closed his eyes and felt of the thing that held him. Cold, hard metal it was—implacable and unyielding.

Clank, clank. The monster was walking with long, jerky strides. The pressure against his ribs brought a gasp of agony from his lips. Each jarring step was an individual and excruciating torture. His breath was cut off by the relentless constriction of one of the tentacles which now encircled his neck. It wouldn't be long now.

Then, when everything had turned black and he had given up hope, he was dumped unceremoniously on the hard floor of the cabin. A harsh laugh greeted him as he struggled weakly to his knees.

"Thought you could put one over on Al Cadorna, did you?" a voice rasped.

The room spun round as he tried to regain his feet. A mist swam before his eyes. Al Cadorna! The most picturesque figure in gangland. Credited with a dozen killings and with ill-gotten wealth untold, this leader of the underworld openly boasted that the police had never gotten anything on him. And they hadn't. So it was a criminal who had laid hands on Shelton's robots, not a foreign spy. Worse and worse. He

thought of what they might be able to do with these invisible mechanical things: make gunmen out of them; safe blowers; house breakers. Why, society would be at their mercy; banks defenceless; the mints, even—

"Stand up on your pins, you worm! Let's have a look at you!" The muzzle of an automatic was thrust in his abdomen, prodding insistently. Things stabilized in the room and he looked up into the cruelest face he had ever seen, and recognizable from the many pictures which had appeared in the yellow press.

Eddie took in the surroundings at a glance. He was in a low-ceilinged room that was almost unfurnished. In one corner there was a replica of Shelton's robot control, televue disc and all. Carlos had just pulled the switch and the robot was taking visible form. The man who prodded him with the automatic was Cadorna, no doubt of that. His evil leer and yellow eyes marked him at once. The other occupant of the room was a big square-built man with a patch over one eye and strips of adhesive tape across his nose—his antagonist of the night before. Must have sneaked

off after he came to; it was safer to send one of the robots after the *verdammt Amerikaner*. Eddie restrained a chuckle at the thought.

"Nothing to laugh at, kid!" Cadorna snarled. "You're goin' for a nice long ride pretty quick. Know that?"

Eddie's head was clearing rapidly, but he pretended to sway on his feet. Lina and her father were not in sight. If only he could spar for a little time.

"What's the idea?" he asked. "Haven't you guys got enough?"

"That's our business. We know what we're doin', and when you butted in you just signed your own papers. Dead men don't talk, you know, kid!"

There was a door at the other side of the room. If only he could see whether Lina was in there; whether she was alive.

"Tie him up, Gus!" Cadorna kept the pistol pressed into the pit of Eddie's stomach as he gave the order.

"Hands and feet—and make it a good job, you wiener."

Eddie shouted then. "Lina!" Resistance was useless, but it would give him some satisfaction to know she still lived even though Cadorna pulled that trigger in the next instant. No reply came from beyond that door.

"So!" Cadorna grinned maliciously. "Another victim! Carlos first, then you, and now—Al Cadorna. If you're worrying about her, kid, you needn't. She'll be perfectly safe with me."

Eddie's roar of rage shook the rafters. Heedless of consequences, he brought his knee up suddenly and violently. Cadorna sank to the floor with a groan, his pistol clattering harmlessly on the rough planks. In a flash Eddie retrieved it, dropping behind the prostrate form of the stricken gangster. Gus had fired and missed. Now he dared not shoot for fear of hitting his chief. Eddie's gun spat fire and the big German clapped his hands over his heart, his good eye widening in surprise. Then he reeled and pitched forward on his face. A feminine cry sounded from the

adjoining room and Eddie's heart skipped a beat when he heard it.

Carlos was padding across the floor, trying to get into a position where he could fire without endangering Cadorna. Eddie swung his pistol around and pulled the trigger. A miss! He fired again, but too late. Fingers of steel had gripped his wrist and the king of gangland rolled over on him, twisting the gun from his hand. Clubbed now, the pistol was raised high over that distorted, malicious face. Eddie tried to twist away from under the blow as it started its downward swing, then a thousand steam hammers hit him all at once and ... blackness....

Something was pounding insistently at the doors of his consciousness. He must pull himself together! They'd left him for dead and he was—almost. But voices as loud and raucous as those would waken the dead. He groaned with pain when he attempted to move his head.

"That for you, you rat." It was Cadorna's voice. "Try to take my woman, will you?"

The pounding resolved itself into the angry barking of an automatic. Someone squealed with mortal agony. Eddie opened his eyes cautiously and saw that the room was full of people. The pungent odor of burned powder assailed his nostrils. There was Cadorna and Carlos, David Shelton and Lina. An undersized, dapper youth stood over the body of the big German, his hands outstretched before his horror-stricken face. A moment he stood thus, like a statue. Then his knees gave way beneath him and he crumpled into a grotesque heap beside the man who had been called Gus. Such was the manner of Cadorna's dealing with those who displeased him.

The door to the adjoining room was open. Lina and her father had been kept in there, with the little thug as their guard. Evidently Cadorna had caught him trying to force his attentions on the girl. Good thing he'd killed him.

Lina was sobbing and the sound brought increased agony to the helpless Eddie. He lay still where they had placed him, beside the table which supported the robot control apparatus. His cheek was against the

floor and he saw that a little pool of blood was forming there, blood drawn by the butt of Cadorna's pistol when it contacted with his skull. He was bound hand and foot. They hadn't thought him dead, after all. Keeping him for that ride and a watery grave. Couldn't afford to leave his body around where it might be found.

"What are you going to do with us?" Shelton was asking, his voice bravely defiant. Game old sport at that, he was.

"Don't fret over your daughter. Al Cadorna's her protector now, and she'll be taken care of better'n she's ever been. But you—that's somethin' else again. First off, you're goin' to give Carlos the dope on these trick metals in your machines. He couldn't analyze 'em, or whatever you call it. Then you're goin' to have a nice long ride with your friend over there."

"You'll go to the chair for this, Cadorna. And I'll never tell you the secret of the alloys."

"Tell him, Dad," Lina was crying. "He'll let us go if you

do."

"The hell I will, girlie. What I said, goes. We'll make him talk first, too," Cadorna snarled.

"Never!" Shelton shouted.

Lina had seen Eddie and, with a little cry, she bounded across the room. Carlos was after her like a panther.

"Hands off that dame!" Cadorna yelled. "Let her cry over the boy friend if she wants to. Won't do her any good. You get busy and set one of the tin soldiers goin'. Make the old buzzard talk."

Carlos muttered sullenly as he started the motor-generator. Give him a chance and he'd knife Cadorna in the back—for Lina.

The girl was kneeling at Eddie's side now, examining his bleeding scalp. He opened one eye and gazed at her solemnly, pursing his lips in a warning to silence. She caught her breath and nodded in understanding.

Cadorna was shouting like a madman. "Keep the damn thing so I can see it, you spig! They make me bug-house when you blink 'em off. Besides, I don't trust you."

The bold Cadorna was afraid of something he couldn't see! An idea flashed across Eddie's quickening mind. But he was helpless—bound so tightly that the cords cut his wrists.

One of the robots was clanking across the room. Lina looked up in momentary terror and Eddie saw her eyes stray over the table top where Carlos was working.

"Want to grab the old one?" the Chilean called.

"Yes. Pick him up and squeeze him till his ribs crack. He'll talk."

Lina let a little moan escape her lips. Eddie was watching as the iron monster approached the scientist and flung its tentacles around his madly struggling form. Lina was fussing with him, trying to

turn him over. Cadorna's back was to them, his face thrust into that of Shelton, who was fighting desperately to avoid the crushing grip of the robot.

"Give him a squeeze, Carlos."

Shelton's yell brought another low moan from the girl's set lips. She was working furiously at Eddie's bonds. Lord, she had a knife! Good girl! Must have found it on the table. His hands were free and he wriggled his fingers to bring them to life. Then his feet. He was able to move. Lina whispered in his ear.

"All right?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes," he whispered. Somehow their lips touched and Eddie felt his heart pound at his temples. New life came to him with a rush of exaltation.

Shelton was crying out in pain and Lina sprang to her feet. "You beast!" she shouted at Cadorna. "Let him go."

Then she was across the room, tearing at the

unyielding metal bands that pinioned her father and slowly crushed him. Cadorna laughed mirthlessly.

"Tell him to give me the dope," he retorted. "Then I'll let him go—for a while."

Shelton's head hung on his chest, rolling weakly from side to side. Eddie doubted whether he could speak if he wished to. The Chilean was working at the controls, increasing the tension of those terrible tentacles. Eddie raised himself to his knees, watching Cadorna narrowly. He fingered the knife Lina had used in freeing him. No, he couldn't use that. The Chilean would cry out and queer everything. He laid it on the floor, within easy reach.

Cadorna was cursing now, first Shelton and then the girl. His rage was maniacal. "Another notch!" he bellowed.

Eddie rose silently and clamped his fingers on the Chilean's windpipe. Lina's eyes widened as she saw. She did everything in her power to keep Cadorna's attention occupied as Eddie sunk those fingers into

Carlos' throat. The Chilean's eyes popped from his head as he struggled furiously to tear away the steel-sinewed hand that had stopped off his breath. Death was staring him in the face, and he could not cry out. His strength left suddenly as the fingers dug in deeper, and Eddie shook him as he would a rat. In a surprisingly short time he had slumped to the floor, and not until his squirmings ceased did Eddie loose that awful grip.

"Another notch, you spiggoty!"

Eddie bent over the controls. Lina's pleadings mingled with the curses of Cadorna. She was cajoling now—telling the brute she'd go with him gladly if only he'd free her father; promising anything, everything, in the desperate attempt to keep him from discovering that his last henchman was out of the picture. But her words served only to spur Eddie to swifter action. He twirled the knobs of the dual control. The second robot was fading from view. He'd give Cadorna a dose of the thing he really feared. He eased off a little on the other control, releasing the pressure on poor Shelton's ribs as much as he dared.

The position indicator of the second robot moved slightly as Eddie started the invisible monster toward the yelling gangster. He watched the screen closely. It was quite a trick, at that, controlling these things you couldn't see. All you had to go by were these sketchy representations in the televue; tiny flecks of light that outlined the various movable members of the robot.

"Eddie!" Lina screamed suddenly. "Look out!"

But he had seen Cadorna wheel around as he watched his image on the screen. At that moment a tentacle was writhing its way around his thick neck. A bullet whistled past Eddie's ear and buried itself harmlessly in the wall.

Then from the blasphemous mouth of the king of gangland there came a shriek of awful fear. The tightening tentacle shut it off in a choking gurgle. Cadorna was captured at last—by a monster he could not see, a monster that struck terror to his craven soul.

It was the work of but a moment to free David Shelton from the grip of the other robot. The tortured man tottered into Lina's arms for support.

Eddie played with Cadorna now, releasing the grip from his throat and pinioning his arms instead. With rapid fingers he manipulated the controls until the screaming gangster was raised high in the air by the unseen arms of the robot.

"Another notch, Al," he chortled.

Cadorna yelled anew as the clamps tightened, "For God's sake, kid, quit it! Let me down. I'll do anything you say."

"Yeah?" Eddie moved one of the rheostat knobs a trifle.

The prince of racketeers was whimpering now, like a baby. The sharp snap of a rib punctured his outcries.

"Another notch," said Eddie grimly.

But the king of the underworld had fainted.

An hour later Eddie Vail surveyed the scene complacently. Lina had washed the blood from his head and face and bandaged his wound. Luckily, Cardorna's blow had been a glancing one. The girl was fussing over her father, now, and the scientist was on the point of resenting her attentions; swore he could take care of himself; he wasn't a baby. Carlos and his chief were trussed up like mummies, and had been snarling at each other ever since the Chilean recovered his senses, each blaming the other for their predicament. The robots stood motionless by the wall.

This would be a big haul for the police. Plenty of evidence to send Cadorna to the chair now. The murder of Butch Collins, the undersized thug, had been witnessed by three of them. No, four: Carlos would squeal. He was that kind. There would be rejoicing in the underworld too, for Cadorna had many enemies. They'd be killing each other off in droves though, for the leaders of rival gangs would be battling for his place.

"Guess we'll have to dump them in the limousine," he remarked to Shelton. "Drive them to the nearest town and turn them over to the authorities."

"Yes. Then they can come back for the bodies of the other two." Shelton grimaced as he contemplated the sprawled figures.

"What about your robots?" Eddie asked.

"Why, I'll go ahead with my original plans, of course." The scientist looked surprised.

"Dad!" Lina turned beseeching eyes on Eddie and his heart performed amazingly as he looked into their depths.

"And why not?" asked her father dolefully. "They'll insure the peace of the world. They'll—"

"Listen, Mr. Shelton," Eddie interrupted. "If you'll think a little you'll realize that they'll do no such thing. Has any new and terrible engine of destruction ever accomplished that result? No—the enemy always

finds a way of combating the new weapon and of devising another still more terrible. You've discovered a marvelous thing, but its value is quite problematical."

"How can they ever combat a thing they cannot see?"

"Easily. Why, I could devise a televue attachment in two days that would make them visible. Photo-electric cells are capable of detecting ultra-violet light as you well know. Radium glows under its rays. Why not coat a televue screen with some radio-active material?"

Shelton frowned thoughtfully. "You're right. Vail," he said, after a moment of silence; "absolutely right. It was only a dream."

With dragging feet he walked to the transmitter, his expression grim in the realization of failure. He started the motor-generator with a gesture of finality.

"What are you going to do?" Eddie asked fearfully.

"Watch me! At least I can demonstrate another phase

of the basic principle I have discovered."

The motors of both robots whirred.

"Don't!" Cadorna wailed. "For God's sake, don't blink 'em out!"

Carlos cursed his chief for a coward.

Shelton was talking rapidly as he manipulated the controls. Instead of building up the wave motion to the frequency of invisible light he was reducing it. Past the other end of the spectrum and into the infrared. The heat ray! Both monsters were changing color as he marched them through the door and into the open. But now they glowed with a visible red that rapidly intensified to the dazzling whiteness of intense heat. Cadorna babbled in superstitious terror. Then, in an instant, both mechanisms were reduced to shapeless blobs of molten metal. Lina clapped her hands gleefully.

Shelton looked up with enthusiasm once more shining in his face. "Vail, my boy," he said, "we can find some

use for that in industry. Let the next war take care of itself."

"You bet!" Eddie was lost in contemplation of the girl—the flush of pleasure that came at her father's words; the shining eyes.

"Then you'll leave the old place down here?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes, as soon as we get rid of these crooks and the other robot. Vail is to spend the rest of his vacation with us, too—if he will."

Would he? Eddie gazed at the girl in rapt admiration and with an inward thrill over his astounding good fortune. Her eyes dropped before the intensity in his and her flush heightened.

David Shelton was wiping his glasses and peering at them with an understanding smile. Good sport, Shelton—and in some ways as wise as they made them. Eddie waited breathlessly for the girl to speak.

"Oh, that's wonderful, Dad," she approved; "and I'm sure that Mr. Vail will agree."

She turned those glorious eyes on Eddie once more and her inquiring smile spoke volumes. He opened his mouth to accept the invitation but the words would not come. He could only nod his head vigorously like an abashed schoolboy.

Some vacation!

76 The Meteor Girl by Jack Williamson

Through the complicated space-time of the fourth dimension goes Charlie King in an attempt to rescue the Meteor Girl.

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

we could hear nothing



- - -

"What's the good in Einstein, anyhow?"

I shot the question at lean young Charlie King. In a moment he looked up at me; I thought there was pain in the back of his clear brown eyes. Lips closed in a thin white line across his wind-tanned face; nervously he tapped his pipe on the metal cowl of the *Golden Gull's* cockpit.

"I know that space is curved, that there is really no space or time, but only space-time, that electricity and gravitation and magnetism are all the same. But how is that going to pay my grocery bill—or yours?"

"That's what Virginia wants to know."

"Virginia Randall!" I was astonished. "Why, I thought —"

"I know. We've been engaged a year. But she's called it off."

Charlie looked into my eyes for a long minute, his lips still compressed. We were leaning on the freshly painted, streamline fuselage of the *Golden Gull*, as neat a little amphibian monoplane as ever made three hundred miles an hour. She stood on the glistening white sand of our private landing field on the eastern Florida coast. Below us the green Atlantic was running in white foam on the rocks.

In the year that Charlie King and I had been out of the Institute of Technology, we had built the nucleus

of a commercial airplane business. We had designed and built here in our own shops several very successful seaplanes and amphibians. Charlie's brilliant mathematical mind was of the greatest aid, except when he was too far lost in his abstruse speculations to descend to things commercial. Mathematics is painful enough to me when it is used in calculating the camber of an airplane wing. And pure mathematics, such as the theories of relativity and equivalence, I simply abhor.

I was amazed. Virginia Randall was a girl trim and beautiful as our shining *Golden Gull*. I had thought them devotedly in love, and had been looking forward to the wedding.

"But it isn't two weeks, since Virginia was out here! You took her up in our *Western Gull IV*!"

Nervously Charlie lit his pipe, drew quickly on it. His face, lean and drawn beneath the flying goggles pushed up on his forehead, sought mine anxiously.

"I know. I drove her back to the station. That was

when—when we quarreled."

"But why? About Einstein? That's silly."

"She wanted me to give it up here, and go in with her father in his Wall Street brokerage business. The old gent is willing to take me, and make a business man of me."

"Why, I couldn't run the business without you, Charlie!"

"We talked about that, Hammond. I don't really do much of the work. Just play around with the mathematics, and leave the models and blueprints to you."

"Oh, Charlie, that's not quite—"

"It's the truth, right enough," he said, bitterly. "You design aircraft, and I play with Einstein. And as you say, a fellow can't eat equations."

"I'd hate to see you go."

"And I'd hate to give up you, and our business, and the math. Really no need of it. My tastes are simple enough. And old 'Iron-clad' Randall has made all one family needs. Virginia's not exactly a pauper, herself. Two or three millions, I think."

"And where did Virginia go?"

"She took the *Valhalla* yesterday at San Francisco. Going to join her father at Panama. He cruises about the world in his steam yacht, you know, and runs Wall Street by radio. I was to telegraph her if I'd changed my mind. I decided to stick to you, Hammond. I telegraphed a corsage of orchids, and sent her the message, 'Einstein forever!'"

"If I know Virginia, those were not very politic words."

"Well, a man—"

His words were cut short by a very unusual incident.

A thin, high scream came suddenly from above our neat stuccoed hangars at the edge of the white field. I

looked up quickly, to catch a glimpse of a bright object hurtling through the air above our heads. The bellowing scream ended abruptly in a thunderous crash. I felt a tremor of the ground underfoot.

"What—" I ejaculated.

"Look!" cried Charlie.

He pointed. I looked over the gleaming metal wing of the *Golden Gull*, to see a huge cloud of white sand rising like a fountain at the farther side of the level field. Deliberately the column of debris rose, spread, rained down, leaving a gaping crater in the earth.

"Something fell?"

"It sounded like a shell from a big gun, except that it didn't explode. Let's get over and see!"

We ran to where the thing had struck, three hundred yards across the field. We found a great funnel-shaped pit torn in the naked earth. It was a dozen yards across, fifteen feet deep, and surrounded with a

powdery ring of white sand and pulverized rock.

"Something like a shell-hole," I observed.

"I've got it!" Charlie cried. "It was a meteor!"

"A meteor? So big?"

"Yes. Lucky for us it was no bigger. If it had been like the one that fell in Siberia a few years ago, or the one that made the Winslow crater in Arizona—we wouldn't have been talking about it. Probably we have a chunk of nickel-iron alloy here."

"I'll get some of the men out here with digging tools, and we'll see what we can find."

Our mechanics were already hurrying across the field. I shouted at them to bring picks and shovels. In a few minutes five of us were at work throwing sand and shattered rock out of the pit.

Suddenly I noticed a curious thing. A pale bluish mist hung in the bottom of the pit. It was easily

transparent, no denser than tobacco smoke. Passing my spade through it did not seem to disturb it in the least.

I rubbed my eyes doubtfully, said to Charlie, "Do you see a sort of blue haze in the pit?"

He peered. "No. No.... Yes. Yes, I do! Funny thing. Kind of a blue fog. And the tools cut right through it without moving it! Queer! Must have something to do with the meteor!" He was very excited.

We dug more eagerly. An hour later we had opened the hole to a depth of twenty feet. Our shovels were clanging on the gray iron of the rock from space. The mist had grown thicker as the excavation deepened; we looked at the stone through a screen of motionless blue fog.

We had found the meteor. There were several queer things about it. The first man who touched it—a big Swede mechanic named Olson—was knocked cold as if by a nasty jolt of electricity. It took half an hour to bring him to consciousness.

As fast as the rugged iron side of the meteorite was uncovered, a white crust of frost formed over it.

"It was as cold as outer space, nearly at the absolute zero," Charlie explained. "And it was heated only superficially during its quick passage through the air. But how it comes to be charged with electricity—I can't say."

He hurried up to his laboratory behind the hangars, where he had equipment ranging from an astronomical telescope to a delicate seismograph. He brought back as much electrical equipment as he could carry. He had me touch an insulated wire to the frost-covered stone from space, while he put the other end to one post of a galvanometer.

I think he got a current that wrecked the instrument. At any rate, he grew very much excited.

"Something queer about that stone!" he cried. "This is the chance of a lifetime! I don't know that a meteor has ever been scientifically examined so soon after falling."

He hurried us all across to the laboratory. We came back with a truck load of coils and tubes and batteries and potentiometers and other assorted equipment. He had men with heavy rubber gloves lift the frost-covered stone to a packing box on a bench. The thing was irregular in shape, about a foot long; it must have weighed two hundred pounds. He sent a man racing on a motorcycle to the drug store to get dry ice (solidified carbon dioxide) to keep the iron stone at its low temperature.

In a few hours he had a complete laboratory set up around the meteorite. He worked feverishly in the hot sunshine, reading the various instruments he had set up, and arranging more. He contrived to keep the stone cold by packing it in a box of dry ice.

The mechanics stopped for dinner, and I tried to get him to take time to eat.

"No, Hammond," he said. "This is something big! We were talking about Einstein. This rock seems energized with a new kind of force: all meteors are probably the same way, when they first plunge out of

space. I think this will be to relativity what the falling apple is to gravity. This is a big thing."

He looked up at me, brown eyes flashing.

"This is my chance to make a name, Hammond. If I do something big enough—Virginia might reconsider her opinion."

Charlie worked steadily through the long hot afternoon. I spent most of the time helping him, or gazing in fascination at the curious haze of luminous blue mist that clung like a sphere of azure fog about the meteoric stone. I did not completely understand what he did; the reader who wants the details may consult the monograph he is preparing for the scientific press.

He had the men string up a line from our direct current generator in the shops, to supply power for his electrical instruments. He mounted a powerful electromagnet just below the meteorite, and set up an X-ray tube to bombard it with rays.

Night came, and the fire of the white sun faded from the sky. In the darkness, the curious haze about the stone became luminescent, distinct, a dim, motionless sphere of blue light. I fancied that I saw grotesque shapes flashing through it. A ball of blue fire, shimmering and ghost-like, shrouded the instruments.

Charlie's induction coil buzzed wickedly, with purple fire playing about the terminals. The X-ray tube flickered with a greenish glow. He manipulated the rheostat that controlled the current through the electromagnet, and continued to read his instruments.

"Look at that!" he cried.

The bluish haze about the stone grew brighter; it became a ball of sapphire flame, five feet thick, bright and motionless. A great sphere of shimmering azure fire! Wisps of pale, sparkling bluish mist ringed it. The stone in its box, the X-ray bulb and other apparatus were hidden. The end of the table stuck oddly from the ball of light.

I heard Charlie move a switch. The hum of the coils changed a note.

The ball of blue fire vanished abruptly. It became a hole, a window in space!

Through it, we saw another world!

The darkness of the night hung about us. Where the ball had been was a circle of misty blue flame, five feet across. Through that circle I could see a vast expanse of blue ocean, running in high, white-capped rollers, beneath a sky overcast with low gray clouds.

It was no flat picture like a movie screen. The scene had vast depth; I knew that we were really looking over an infinite expanse of stormy ocean. It was all perfectly clear, distinct, real!

Astounded, I turned to find Charlie standing back and looking into the ring of blue fire, with a curious mixture of surprise and delighted satisfaction.

"What—what—" I gasped.

"It's amazing! Wonderful! More than I had dared hope for! The complete vindication of my theory! If Virginia cares for scientific reputation—"

"But what is it?"

"It's hard to explain without mathematical language. You might say that we are looking through a hole in space. The new force in the meteorite, amplified by the X-rays and the magnetic field, is causing a distortion of space-time coordinates. You know that a gravitational field bends light; the light of a star is deflected in passing the sun. The field of this meteorite bends light through space-time, through the four-dimensional continuum. That scrap of ocean we can see may be on the other side of the earth."

I walked around the circle of luminous smoke with the marvelous picture in the center. It seemed that the window swung with me. I surveyed the whole angry surface of that slate-gray, storm-beaten sea, to the misty horizon. Nowhere was it broken by land or ship.

Charlie fell to adjusting his rheostat and switches.

It seemed that the gray ocean moved swiftly beyond the window. Vast stretches of it raced below our eyes. Faint black stains of steamer smoke appeared against the blue-gray horizon and swept past. Then land appeared—a long, green-gray line. We had a flash of a long coast that unreeled in endless panorama before us. It was such a view as one might get from a swift airplane—a plane flying thousands of miles per hour.

The Golden Gate flashed before us, with the familiar skyline of San Francisco rising on the hills behind it.

"San Francisco!" Charlie cried. "This is the Pacific we've been seeing. Let's find the *Valhalla*. We might be able to see Virginia!"

The coast-line vanished as he manipulated his instruments. Staring into the circle of shining blue mist, I saw the endless ocean racing below us again. We picked up a pleasure yacht, running under bare poles.

"I didn't know there was such a storm on," Charlie murmured.

Other vessels swam past below us, laboring against heavy seas.

Then we looked upon an ocean whipped into mighty white-crowned waves. Rain beat down in sheets from low dense clouds; vivid violet lightnings flashed before us. It seemed very strange to see such lightning and hear not the faintest whisper of thunder—but no sound came from anything we saw through the blue-rimmed window in space.

"I hope the *Valhalla* isn't in weather like this!" cried Charlie.

In a few minutes a dark form loomed through the wind-riven mist. Swiftly it swam nearer; became a black ship.

"Only a tramp," Charlie said, breathing a sigh of relief.

It was a dingy tramp steamer, her superstructure wrecked. Her fires seemed dead. She lay across the wind, rolling sluggishly, threatening to sink with every

monstrous wave. We saw no living person aboard her; she seemed a sinking derelict. We made out the name *Roma* on her side.

Charlie moved his dials again.

In a few minutes the slender prow of another great steamer came through the sheets of rain. It was evidently a passenger vessel. She seemed limping along, half wrecked, with mighty waves breaking over her rail.

Charlie grew white with alarm. "The *Valhalla*!" he gasped. "And she's headed straight for that wreck!"

In a moment, as he brought the liner closer below our blue-rimmed window, I, too, made out the name. The wet, glistening decks were almost deserted. Here and there a man struggled futilely against the force of the storm.

In a few minutes the drifting wreck of the *Roma* came into our view, dead ahead of the limping liner. Through the mist and falling rain, the derelict could

not have been in sight of the lookout of the passenger vessel until she was almost upon it.

We saw the white burst of steam as the siren was blown. We watched the desperate effort of the liner to check her way, to come about. But it was too much for the already crippled ship. Charlie cried out as a mighty wave drove the *Valhalla* down upon the sluggishly drifting wreck.

All the mad scene that ensued was strangely silent. We heard no crash when the collision occurred; heard no screams or shouts while the mob of desperate, white-faced passengers were fighting their way to the deck. The vain struggle to launch the boats was like a silent movie.

One boat was splintered while being lowered. Another, already filled with passengers, was lifted by a great wave and crushed against the side of the ship. Only shivered wood and red foam were left. The ship listed so rapidly that the boats on the lee side were useless. It was impossible to launch the others in that terrible, lashing sea.

"Virginia can swim." Charlie said hopefully. "You know she tried the Channel last year, and nearly made it, too."

He stopped to watch that terrible scene in white-faced, anxious silence.

The tramp went down before the steamer, drawing fragments of wrecked boats after it. The liner was evidently sinking rapidly. We saw dozens of hopeless, panic-stricken passengers diving off the lee side, trying to swim off far enough to avoid the tremendous suction.

Then, with a curious deliberation, the bow of the *Valhalla* dipped under green water; her stern rose in the air until the ship stood almost perpendicular. She slipped quickly down, out of sight.

Only a few swimming humans, and the wrecks of a few boats, were left on the rough gray sea. Charlie fumbled nervously with his dials, trying to get the scene near enough so that we could see the identity of the struggling swimmers.

A long boat, which must have been swept below by the suction of the ship, came plunging above the surface, upside down. It drifted swiftly among the swimmers, who struggled to reach it. I saw one person, evidently a girl, grasp it and drag herself upon it. It swept on past the few others still struggling.

The wrecked boat with the girl upon it seemed coming swiftly toward our blue-rimmed window. In a few minutes I saw something familiar about her.

"It's Virginia!" Charlie cried. "God! We've got to save her, somehow!"

The long rollers drove the over-turned boat swiftly along. Virginia Randall clung desperately to it, deluged in foam, whipped with flying spray, the wild wind tearing at her.

About us, the clear still night was deepening. The air was warm and still; the hot stars shone steadily. Quiet lighted houses were in sight above the beach. It was very strange to look through the fire-rimmed circle, to

see a girl struggling for life, clinging to a wrecked boat in a stormy sea.

Charlie watched in an apathy of grief and horror, trembling and speechless doing nothing except move the controls to keep the floating girl in our sight.

Hours went by as we watched. Then Charlie cried out in sudden hope. "There's a chance! I might do it! I might be able to save her!"

"Might do what?"

"We are able to see what we do because the field of the meteor bends light through the four-dimensional continuum. The world line of a ray of light is a geodesic in the continuum. The field I have built distorts the continuum, so we see rays that originated at a distant point. Is that clear?"

"Clear as mud!"

"Well, anyhow, if the field were strong enough, we could bring physical objects through space-time,

instead of mere visual images. We could pick Virginia up and bring her right here to the crater! I'm sure of it!"

"You mean you could move a girl through some four or five thousand miles of space!"

"You don't understand. She wouldn't come through space at all, but through space-time, through the continuum, which is a very different thing. She is four thousand miles away in our three-dimensional space, but in space-time, as you see, she is only a few yards away. She is only a few yards from us in the fourth dimension. If I can increase the field a little, she will be drawn right through!"

"You're a wizard if you can do it!"

"I've got to do it! She's a fine swimmer—that's the only reason she's still alive—but she'll never live to reach the shore. Not in a sea like that!"

Charlie fell to work at once, mounting another electromagnet beside the one he had set up, and

rigging up two more X-ray bulbs beside the packing box which held the meteor. The motion of the boat in the fire-rimmed window kept drawing it swiftly away from us, and Charlie showed me how to move the dial of his rheostat to keep the girl in view.

Before he had completed his arrangements, a patch of white foam came into view just ahead of the drifting boat. In a moment I made out a cruel black rock, with the angry sea breaking into fleecy spray upon it. The boat was almost upon it, driving straight for it. Charlie saw it, and cried out in horror.

The long black hull of the splintered boat, floating keel upward, was only a few yards away. A great white-capped breaker lifted it and hurled it forward, with the girl clinging to it. She drew herself up and stared in terror at the black rock, while another long surging roller picked up the boat and swept it forward again.

I stood, paralyzed in horror, while the shattered boat was driven full upon the great rock. I could imagine the crash of it, but it was all as still as a silent picture.

The boat, riding high on a crest of white foam, smashed against the rock and was shivered to splinters. Virginia was hurled forward against the slick wet stone. Desperately she scrambled to reach the top of the boulder. Her hands slipped on the polished rock; the wild sea dragged at her. At last she got out of reach of the angry gray water, though spume still deluged her.

I breathed a sigh of relief, though her position was still far from enviable.

"Virginia! Virginia! Why did I let you go?" Charlie cried.

Desperately he fell to work again, mounting the magnet and tubes. Another hour went by, while I watched the shivering girl on the rock. Bobbed hair, wet and glistening, was plastered close against her head, and her clothing was torn half off. She looked utterly exhausted; it seemed to take all her ebbing energy to cling to the rock against the force of the wind and the waves that dashed against her. She looked cold, blue and trembling.

The water stood higher.

"The tide is rising!" Charlie exclaimed. "It will cover the rock pretty soon. If I don't get her off in time—she's lost!"

He finished twisting his wires together.

"I've got it all ready," he said. "Now, I've got to find out exactly where she is, to know how to set it. Even then it's fearfully uncertain. I hate to try it, but it's the only chance.

"You can find out?"

"Yes. From the spectral shift and other factors. I'll have to get some other apparatus." He ran up to the laboratory, across the level field that lay black beneath the stars. He came back, panting, with spectrometer, terrestrial globe, and other articles.

"The tide is higher!" he cried as he looked through the blue-rimmed circle at the girl on the rock. "She'll be swept off before long!"

He mounted the spectrometer and fell to work with a will, taking observations through the telescope, adjusting prisms and diffraction gratings, reading electrometers and other apparatus, and stopping to make intricate calculations.

I helped him when I could, or stared through the ring of shining blue mist, where I could see the waves breaking higher about the exhausted girl who clung to the rock. Clouds of wind-whipped spray often hid her from sight. I knew that she would not have the strength to hold on much longer against the force of the rising sea.

Although driven almost to distraction by the horror of her predicament, he worked with a cool, swift efficiency. Only the pale, anxiety-drawn expression on his face showed how great was the strain. He finished the last spectrometer observation, snatched out a pad and fell to figuring furiously.

"Something queer here," he said presently, frowning. "A shift of the spectrum that I can't explain by distortion through three-dimensional space alone. I

don't understand it."

We stared at the chilled and trembling girl on the rock.

"I'm almost afraid to try it. What if something went wrong?"

He turned to the terrestrial globe he had brought down and traced a line over it. He made a quick calculation on his pad, then made a fine dot on the globe with the pencil point.

"Here she is. On a rock some miles off Point Eugenia, on the coast of the Mexican State of Lower California. Most lonely spot in the world. No chance for a rescue. We must—

"My god!" he screamed in sudden horror. "Look!"

I looked through the blue-ringed window and saw the girl. Green water was surging about her waist. It seemed that each wave almost tore her off. Then I saw that she was struggling with something. A great

coiling tentacle, black and leathery and glistening, was thrust up out of the green water. It wavered deliberately through the air and grasped at the girl. She seemed to scream, though we could hear nothing. She beat at the monster, weakly, vainly.

"She's gone!" cried Charlie.

"An octopus!" I said. "A giant cuttlefish!"

Virginia made a sudden fierce effort. With a strength that I had not thought her chilled limbs possessed, she tore away from the dreadful creature and clambered higher on the rock. But still a hideous black tentacle clung about her ankle, tugging at her, drawing her back despite her desperate struggle to break free.

"I've got to try it!" Charlie said, determination flashing in his eyes. "It's a chance!"

He closed a switch. His new coils sung out above the old one. X-ray tubes flickered beside the blue fire that ringed the window. He adjusted his rheostats and

closed the circuit through the new magnet.

A curtain of blue flame was drawn quickly between us and the round, fire-rimmed window. A huge ball of blue fire hung, about the meteorite and the instruments. For minutes it hung there, while Charlie, perspiring, worked desperately with the apparatus. Then it expanded; became huge. It exploded noiselessly, in a great flash of sapphire flame, then vanished completely.

Meteor, bench, and apparatus were gone!

In the light of the stars we could make out the huge crater the meteorite had torn, with a few odds and ends of equipment scattered about it. But all the apparatus Charlie had set up, connected with the meteoric stone, had disappeared.

He was dumbfounded, staggered with disappointment.

"Virginia! Virginia!" he called out, in a hopeless tone. "No, she isn't here. It didn't draw her through. I've

failed. And we can't even see her any more!"

Desperately I searched for consolation for him.

"Maybe the octopus won't hurt her," I offered. "They say that most of the stories of their ferocity are somewhat exaggerated."

"If the monster doesn't get her, the tide will!" he said bitterly. "I made a miserable failure of it! And I don't know why! I can't understand it!"

Apathetically, he picked up his pad and held it in the light of his electric lantern.

"Something funny about this equation. The shift of the spectrum lines can't be accounted for by distortion through space alone."

With wrinkled brow, he stared for many minutes at the bit of paper he held in the white circle of light. Suddenly he seized a pencil and figured rapidly.

"I have it! The light was bent through time! I should

have recognized these space-time coordinates."

He calculated again.

"Yes. The scene we saw in that circle of light was distant from us not only in space but in time. The *Valhalla* probably hasn't sunk yet at all. We were looking into the future!"

"But how can that be? Seeing things before they happen!"

I have the profoundest respect for Charlie King's mathematical genius. But when he said that I was frankly incredulous.

"Space and time are only relative terms. Our material universe is merely the intersection of tangled world lines of geodesics in a four-dimensional continuum. Space and time have no meaning independently of each other. Jeans says. 'A terrestrial astronomer may reckon that the outburst on Nova Persei occurred a century before the great fire of London, but an astronomer on the Nova may reckon with equal

accuracy that the great fire occurred a century before the outburst on the Nova.' The field of this meteorite deflected light waves so that we saw them earlier, according to our conventional ideas of time, than they originated. We saw several hours into the future.

"And the amplified field of the magnet, though strong enough to move Virginia through space, was not sufficiently powerful to draw her back to us across time. Yet she must have felt the pull. Some dreadful thing may have happened. The problem is rather complicated."

He lifted his pencil again. In the glow of the little electric lantern I saw his lean young face tense with the fierce effort of his thought. His pencil raced across the little pad, setting down symbols that I could make nothing of.

My own thoughts were racing. Seeing into the future was a rather revolutionary idea to me. My mind is conservative; I have always been sceptical of the more fantastic ideas suggested by science. But Charlie seemed to know what he was talking about. In

view of the marvelous things he had done that night, it seemed hardly fair to doubt him now. I decided to accept his astounding statement at face value and to follow the adventure through.

He lifted his pencil and consulted the luminous dial of his wrist watch.

"We saw that last scene some twelve hours and forty minutes before it happened—to put it in conventional language. The distortion of the time coordinates amounted to that."

In the light of dawn—for we had been all night at the meteor pit, and silver was coming in the east—he looked at me with fierce resolve in his eyes.

"Hammond, that gives us over twelve hours to get to Virginia!"

"You mean to go? But just twelve hours! That's better than the transcontinental record—to say nothing of the time it would take to find a little rock in the Pacific!"

"We have the *Golden Gull*! She's as fast as any ship we've ever flown."

"But we can't take the *Gull*! Those alterations haven't been made. And that new engine! A bear-cat for power, but it may go dead any second. The *Gull* can fly, but she isn't safe!"

"Safety be damned! I've got to get to Virginia, and get there in the next twelve hours!"

"The *Gull* will fly, but—"

"All right. Please help me get off!"

"Help you off? It's a fool thing to do! But if you go, I do!"

"Thanks, Hammond. Awfully!" He gripped my hand.
"We've got to make it!"

With a last glance into the gaping pit from which we had dug the marvelous stone, we turned and ran across to the hangars. As we ran the sun came above

the sea in the east: its first rays struck us like a fiery lance. The mechanics had not yet appeared. Charlie pushed the doors back, and we ran out the trim little *Golden Gull*, beautiful with her slender wing and her graceful, tapering lines.

I seized the starting crank and Charlie sprang into the cockpit. I cranked until the mechanism was droning dismally, and pulled the lever that engaged it with the engine. I had been in too much haste to get up the proper speed, and the powerful new engine failed to fire. Charlie almost cried with vexation while I was cranking again.

This time the motor coughed and fell into a steady, vibrant roar. With the wind from the propeller screaming about me, I disengaged the crank and stood waiting while the motor warmed. Charlie gave it scant time to do so before he motioned me to kick out the blocks. I tumbled into the enclosed cockpit beside him, he gave the ship the gun, and we roared across the field.

In five minutes we were flying west, at a speed just

under three hundred miles per hour. Charlie was crouched over the stick, scanning the instrument board, and flying the *Gull* almost at her top speed. Again and again his eyes went to the little clock on the panel.

"Twelve hours and forty minutes," he said. "And an hour gone already! We're got to be there by five minutes after six."

We were flying over Louisiana when the oil line clogged. The engine heated dangerously. Reluctantly, Charlie cut off the ignition, and fell in a swift spiral to an open field.

"We're got to fix it!" he said. "Another hour gone! And we needed every minute!"

"This new engine! It's powerful enough, but we should have had time to overhaul it, and make those changes."

Charlie landed with his usual skill, and we fell to work in desperate haste. A grizzled farmer, a wad of

tobacco in his cheek and three ragged urchins at his heels, stopped to watch us. He had just been to his mailbox, and had a morning paper in his hand. Charlie questioned him about the storm.

"Storm-center nears the American coast," he read in a nasal drawl. "Greatest storm of year drives shipping upon west coast. Six vessels reported lost. *S. S. Valhalla*, disabled, sends S. O. S.

"A thousand lives are the estimated toll to-night of the most terrific storm of the year, which is sweeping toward the Pacific coast, driving all shipping before it. Radiograms from the *Valhalla* at 5 P. M. report that she is disabled and in danger. It is doubtful that rescue vessels can reach her through the storm."

We got the engine repaired, took off again. Charlie looked at the little clock.

"Five minutes to ten. Eight hours and ten minutes left, and we've got a darn long ways to go."

We had to stop at San Antonio, Texas, to replenish

gasoline and oil.

"Ten minutes lost!" Charlie complained as we took off. "And that monster—waiting in the future to drag Virginia to a hideous death!"

Two hours later the plane developed trouble in the ignition system. The motor was new, with several radical changes that we had introduced to increase power and lessen weight. As I had objected to Charlie, we had not done enough experimental work on it to perfect it.

We limped into the field at El Paso and spent another priceless half-hour at work. I got some sandwiches at a luncheon counter beside the field, and listened a moment to a radio loudspeaker there.

"Many thousands are dead," came the crisp, metallic voice of the announcer, "as a result of the storm now raging on the Pacific coast, the worst in several years. The storm-center is spending its force on the coastal regions to-day. Millions of dollars in damage are reported in cities from San Francisco to Manzanillo,

Mexico.

"The greatest disaster of the storm is the loss of the passenger liner *Valhalla*, of the Red Star Line. It is believed to have collided with the abandoned hulk of an Italian-owned tramp freighter, the *Roma*, which was left by its crew yesterday in a sinking condition. Radiograms from the liner ceased three hours ago, when she was said to be sinking. The officers doubted that her boats could be launched in such a sea—"

I waited to hear no more. Charlie checked our route while we were stopped. And we took off; we crossed the Rio Grande and flew across the rocky, brush-scattered hills of Mexico, in a direct line for the rock in the sea.

"If anything happens so we have to land again—well, it's just too bad," Charlie said grimly. "But we've got to go this way. It's something over six hundred miles in a straight line. Fifteen minutes to four, now. We have to average nearly three hundred miles an hour to get there."

He was silent and intent over his maps and instruments as we flew on over the lofty Sierra Madre Range, and over a long slope down to the Gulf of California. Head-winds beset us as we were over the stretch of blue water, and we flew on into a storm.

"We had hardly time to make it, without the wind against us," Charlie said. "If it holds us back many miles—well, it just mustn't!"

Purple lightning flickered ominously in the mass of blue storm-clouds that hung above the mountainous peninsula of Lower California. I had a qualm about flying into it in our untested machine. But Charlie leaned tensely forward and sent the *Golden Gull* on at the limit of her speed. Gray vapor swirled about us, rent with livid streaks of lightning. Thunder crashed and rumbled above the roar of our racing engine. Wild winds screeched in the struts; rain and hail beat against us. The plane rose and fell; she was swirled about like a falling leaf. The stick struggled in Charlie's hands like a living thing. With lips tightened to a thin line, he fought silently, fiercely, desperately.

Suddenly we were sucked down until I had an uneasy feeling at the pit of my stomach. I saw the grim outline of a bare mountain peak dangerously close below us, shrouded in wind-whipped mist.

In sudden alarm I shouted, "We'd better get out of this, Charlie! We can't live in it long!"

In the roar of the storm he did not hear me, and I shouted again.

He turned to face me, after a glance at the clock. "We've less than an hour, Hammond. We've got to go on!"

I sank back in my seat. The plane rolled and tossed until I thanked my lucky stars for the safety strap. In nervous anxiety I watched Charlie bring the ship up again, and fight his way on through the storm. For an eternity, it seemed, we battled through a chaos of wind-driven mist, bright with purple lightning and shaken with crashing thunder.

Charlie struggled with the controls until he was

dripping with perspiration. He must have been utterly worn out, after thirty-six hours of exhausting effort. A dozen times I despaired of life. The compass had gone to spinning crazily; we dived through the rain until we could pick up landmarks below. Three times a great bare peak loomed suddenly up ahead of us, and Charlie averted collision only by zooming suddenly upward.

Then slate-gray water was beneath us, running in white-crested mountains. I knew that we were at last out over the Pacific.

"We've passed Point Eugenia," Charlie said. "It can't be far, now. But we have only fifteen minutes left. Fifteen minutes to get to her—before the attraction of the meteor jerks her away, perhaps to a horrible fate."

We flew low and fast over the racing waves. Charlie looked over his charts and made a swift calculation. He changed our course a bit and we flew on at top speed. We scanned the vast, mad expanse of sea below the blue-gray clouds. Here and there were lines of white breakers, but nowhere did we see a rock with

a girl upon it. Presently the green outline of an island appeared out of the wild water on our right.

"That's Del Tiburon," Charlie said. "We missed the rock."

He swung the plane about and we flew south over the hastening waves. I looked at the little clock. It showed two minutes to six. I turned to Charlie.

"Seven minutes!" he whispered grimly.

On and on we flew, in a wide circle. The motor roared loud. An endless expanse of racing waves unreeled below us. The little hand crawled around the dial. One minute past six. Only four minutes to go.

We saw a speck of white foam on the mad gray water. It was miles away, almost on the horizon. We plunged toward it, motor bellowing loud. Five miles a minute we flew. The white fleck became a black rock smothered in snowy foam. On we swept, and over the rock, with bullet-like speed.

As we plunged by, I saw Virginia's slender form, tattered, brine-soaked, straggling in the hideous tentacles of the monster octopus. It was the same terrible scene that we had viewed, through the amazing phenomenon of distortion of light through space-time, four thousand miles away and twelve hours before.

In a few minutes the time would come when Charlie had ended our view of the scene by his attempt to draw the girl through the fourth dimension to our apparatus in Florida. What terrible thing might happen then?

Charlie brought the ship about so quickly that we were flung against the sides. Down we came toward the mad waves in a swift glide. In sudden apprehension, I dropped my hand on his shoulder.

"Man, you can't land in a sea like that! It's suicide!"

Without a word, he shook off my hand and continued our steep glide toward the rock. I drew my breath in apprehension of a crash.

I do not blame Charlie for what happened. He is as skilful a pilot as I know. It was a mad freak of the sea that did the thing.

The gray waste of mountainous, white-crested waves rose swiftly up to meet us, with the rock with the girl clinging to it just to our right. The *Golden Gull* struck the crest of a wave, buried herself in the foam, and plunged down the long slope to the trough. We rose safely to the crest of the oncoming roller, and I saw the black outline of the rock not a dozen yards away.

Charlie had landed with all his skill. It was not his fault that the blustering wind caught the ship as she reached the crest of the wave and flung her sidewise toward the rock. It is no fault of his that the white-capped mountain of racing green water completed what the wind had begun and hurled the frail plane crashing on the rock.

I have a confused memory of the wild plunge at the mercy of the wave, of my despair as I realized that we were being wrecked. I must have been knocked unconscious when we struck. The next I remember I

was opening my eyes to find myself on the rock, Charlie's strong arm on my shoulder. I was soaked with icy brine and my head was aching from a heavy blow.

Virginia, shivering and blue, was perched beside us. I could see no sign of the plane: the mighty sea had swept away what was left of it. Clinging to the lee side of the rock I saw the black tentacles of the giant octopus—waiting for a wave to dash us to its mercy.

"All right, Hammond?" Charlie inquired anxiously. "I'm afraid you got a pretty nasty bump on the head. About all I could do to fish you out before the *Gull* was swept away."

He helped me to a better position to withstand the force of the great roller that came plunging down upon us like a moving mountain. Virginia was in his arms, too exhausted to do more than cling to him.

"What can we do?" I sputtered, shaking water from my head.

"Not a thing! We're in a pretty bad fix, I imagine. In a few seconds we will feel the attraction of the meteor's field—the force with which I tried to draw Virginia to the crater through the fourth dimension. I don't know what will happen; we may be jerked out of space altogether. And if that doesn't get us, the tide and the octopus will!"

His voice was drowned in the roar of the coming wave. A mountain of water deluged us. Half drowned, I clung to the rock against the mad water.

Then blinding blue light flashed about me. A sharp crash rang in my ears, like splintering glass. I reeled, and felt myself falling headlong.

I brought up on soft sand.

I sat up, dumbfounded, and opened my eyes. I was sitting on the steep sandy side of a conical pit. Charlie and Virginia were sprawled beside me, looking as astonished as I felt. Charlie got to his knees and lifted the limp form of the girl in his arms.

Something snapped in my brain. The sand-walled pit was suddenly familiar. I got to my feet and clambered out of it. I saw that we were on our own landing field.

Astonishingly, we were back in the meteor crater. Charlie's vanished apparatus was scattered about us. I saw the gray side of the rough iron meteorite itself, half-buried in the sand at the bottom of the pit.

"What—what happened?" I demanded of Charlie.

"Don't you see? Simple enough. I should have thought of it before. The field of the meteorite brought Virginia—and us—through to this point in space. But it could not bring us back through time; instead, the apparatus itself was jerked forward through time. That is why it vanished. We got here just twelve hours and forty minutes after I closed the switch, since we had been looking that far into the future. The mathematical explanation—"

"That's enough for me!" I said hastily. "We better see about a warm, dry bed for Virginia, and some hot soup or something."

Now the rough gray meteorite, in a neat glass case, rests above the mantel in the library of a beautiful home where I am a frequent guest. I was there one evening, a few days ago, when Charlie King fell silent in one of his fits of mathematical speculation.

"Einstein again?" I chaffingly inquired.

He raised his brown eyes and looked at me.

"Hammond, since relativity enabled us to find the Meteor Girl, you ought to be convinced!"

Virginia—whom her husband calls the Meteor Girl—came laughingly to the rescue.

"Yes, Mr. Hammond, what do you think of Einstein now?"

April 1931

77 Monsters of Mars by Edmond Hamilton

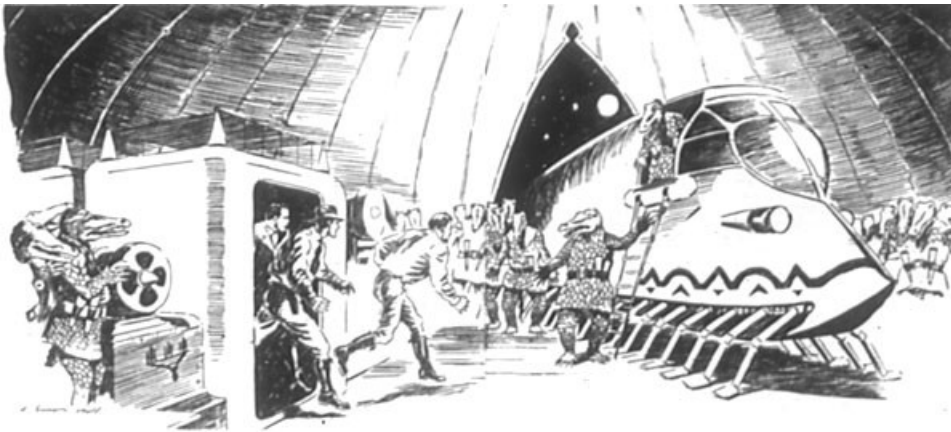
Three Martian-duped Earth-men swing open the gates of space that for so long had barred the greedy hordes of the Red Planet.

Aproximate word count: 12,900

Bigotry:

Warnings:

with a reptilian arm toward the ladder



- - -

Allan Randall stared at the man before him. "And that's why you sent for me, Milton?" he finally asked.

There was a moment's silence, in which Randall's eyes moved as though uncomprehendingly from the face of Milton to those of the two men beside him. The four sat together at the end of a roughly furnished and electric-lit living-room, and in that momentary silence there came in to them from the outside night the distant pounding of the Atlantic upon the beach. It was Randall who first spoke again.

The other's face was unsmiling. "That's why I sent for you, Allan," he said quietly. "To go to Mars with us to-night!"

"To Mars!" he repeated. "Have you gone crazy, Milton—or is this some joke you've put up with Lanier and Nelson here?"

Milton shook his head gravely. "It is not a joke, Allan. Lanier and I are actually going to flash out over the gulf to the planet Mars to-night. Nelson must stay here, and since we wanted three to go I wired you as the most likely of my friends to make the venture."

"But good God!" Randall exploded, rising. "You,

Milton, as a physicist ought to know better. Space-ships and projectiles and all that are but fictionists' dreams."

"We are not going in either space-ship or projectile," said Milton calmly. And then as he saw his friend's bewilderment he rose and led the way to a door at the room's end, the other three following him into the room beyond.

It was a long laboratory of unusual size in which Randall found himself, one in which every variety of physical and electrical apparatus seemed represented. Three huge dynamo-motor arrangements took up the room's far end, and from them a tangle of wiring led through square black condensers and transformers to a battery of great tubes. Most remarkable, though, was the object at the room's center.

It was like a great double cube of dull metal, being in effect two metal cubes each twelve feet square, supported a few feet above the floor by insulated standards. One side of each cube was open, exposing

the hollow interiors of the two cubical chambers. Other wiring led from the big electronic tubes and from the dynamos to the sides of the two cubes.

The four men gazed at the enigmatic thing for a time in silence. Milton's strong, capable face showed only in its steady eyes what feelings were his, but Lanier's younger countenance was alight with excitement; and so too to some degree was that of Nelson. Randall simply stared at the thing, until Milton nodded toward it.

"That," he said, "is what will flash us out to Mars tonight."

Randall could only turn his stare upon the other, and Lanier chuckled. "Can't take it in yet, Randall? Well, neither could I when the idea was first sprung on us."

Milton nodded to seats behind them, and as the half-dazed Randall sank into one the physicist faced him earnestly.

"Randall, there isn't much time now, but I am going to

tell you what I have been doing in the last two years on this God-forsaken Maine coast. I have been for those two years in unbroken communication by radio with beings on the planet Mars!

"It was when I still held my physics professorship back at the university that I got first onto the track of the thing. I was studying the variation of static vibrations, and in so doing caught steady signals—not static—at an unprecedentedly high wave-length. They were dots and dashes of varying length in an entirely unintelligible code, the same arrangement of them being sent out apparently every few hours.

"I began to study them and soon ascertained that they could be sent out by no station on earth. The signals seemed to be growing louder each day, and it suddenly occurred to me that Mars was approaching opposition with earth! I was startled, and kept careful watch. On the day that Mars was closest the earth the signals were loudest. Thereafter, as the red planet receded, they grew weaker. The signals were from some being or beings on Mars!

"At first I was going to give the news to the world, but saw in time that I could not. There was not sufficient proof, and a premature statement would only wreck my own scientific reputation. So I decided to study the signals farther until I had irrefutable proof, and to answer them if possible. I came up here and had this place built, and the aerial towers and other equipment I wanted set up. Lanier and Nelson came with me from the university, and we began our work.

"Our chief object was to answer those signals, but it proved heartbreaking work at first. We could not produce a radio wave of great enough length to pierce out through earth's insulating layer and across the gulf to Mars. We used all the power of our great windmill-dynamo hook-ups, but for long could not make it. Every few hours like clockwork the Martian signals came through. Then at last we heard them repeating one of our own signals. We had been heard!

"For a time we hardly left our instruments. We began the slow and almost impossible work of establishing intelligent communication with the Martians. It was with numbers we began. Earth is the third planet

from the sun and Mars the fourth, so three represented earth and four stood for Mars. Slowly we felt our way to an exchange of ideas, and within months were in steady and intelligent communication with them.

"They asked us first concerning earth, its climates and seas and continents, and concerning ourselves, our races and mechanisms and weapons. Much information we flashed out to them, the language of our communication being English, the elements, of which they had learned, with a mixture of numbers and symbolical dot-dash signals.

"We were as eager to learn about them. They were somewhat reticent, we found, concerning their planet and themselves. They admitted that their world was a dying one and that their great canals were to make life possible on it, and also admitted that they were different in bodily form from ourselves.

"They told us finally that communication like this was too ineffective to give us a clear picture of their world, or vice versa. If we could visit Mars, and then

they visit earth, both worlds would benefit by the knowledge of the other. It seemed impossible to me, though I was eager enough for it. But the Martians said that while spaceships and the like were impossible, there was a way by which living beings could flash from earth to Mars and back by radio waves, even as our signals flashed!"

Randall broke in in amazement. "By radio!" he exclaimed, and Milton nodded.

"Yes, so they said, nor did the idea of sending matter by radio seem too insane, after all. We send sound, music by radio waves across half the world from our broadcasting stations. We send light, pictures, across the world from our television stations. We do that by changing the wave length of the light-vibrations to make them radio vibrations, flashing them out thus over the world, to receivers which alter their wavelengths again and change them back into light-vibrations.

"Why then could not matter be sent in the same way? Matter, it has been long believed, is but another

vibration of the ether, like light and radiant heat and radio vibrations and the like, having a lower wave-length than any of the others. Suppose we take matter and by applying electrical force to it change its wave-length, step it up to the wave-length of radio vibrations? Then those vibrations can be flashed forth from the sending station to a special receiver that will step them down again from radio vibrations to matter vibrations. Thus matter, living or non-living, could be flashed tremendous distances in a second!

"This the Martians told us, and said they would set up a matter-transmitter and receiver on Mars and would aid and instruct us so that we could set up a similar transmitter and receiver here. Then part of us could be flashed out to Mars as radio vibrations by the transmitter, and in moments would have flashed across the gulf to the red planet and would be transformed back from radio vibrations to matter-vibrations by the receiver awaiting us there!

"Naturally we agreed enthusiastically to build such a matter-transmitter and receiver, and then, with their instructions signalled to us constantly, started the

work. Weeks it took, but at last, only yesterday, we finished it. The thing's two cubical chambers are one for the transmitting of matter and the other for its reception. At a time agreed on yesterday we tested the thing, placing a guinea pig in the transmitting chamber and turning on the actuating force. Instantly the animal vanished, and in moments came a signal from the Martians saying that they had received it unharmed in their receiving chamber.

"Then we tested it the other way, they sending the same guinea pig to us, and in moments it flashed into being in our receiving chamber. Of course the step-down force in the receiving chamber had to be in operation, since had it not been at that moment the radio-vibrations of the animal would have simply flashed on endlessly in endless space. And the same would happen to any of us were we flashed forth and no receiving chamber turned on to receive us.

"We signalled the Martians that all tests were satisfactory, and told them that on the next night at exactly midnight by our time we would flash out ourselves on our first visit to them. They have

promised to have their receiving chamber operating to receive us at that moment, of course, and it is my plan to stay there twenty-four hours, gathering ample proofs of our visit, and then flash back to earth.

"Nelson must stay here, not only to flash us forth to-night, but above all to have the receiving chamber operating to receive us at the destined moment twenty-four hours later. The force required to operate it is too great to use for more than a few minutes at a time, so it is necessary above all that that force be turned on and the receiving chamber ready for us at the moment we flash back. And since Nelson must stay, and Lanier and I wanted another, we wired you, Randall, in the hope that you would want to go with us on this venture. And do you?"

As Milton's question hung, Randall drew a long breath. His eyes were on the two great cubical chambers, and his brain seemed whirling at what he had heard. Then he was on his feet with the others.

"Go? Could you keep me from going? Why, man, it's the greatest adventure in history!"

Milton grasped his hand, as did Lanier, and then the physicist shot a glance at the square clock on the wall. "Well, there's little enough time left us," he said, "for we've hardly an hour before midnight, and at midnight we must be in that transmitting chamber for Nelson to send us flashing out!"

Randall could never recall but dimly afterward how that tense hour passed. It was an hour in which Milton and Nelson went with anxious faces and low-voiced comments from one to another of the pieces of apparatus in the room, inspecting each carefully, from the great dynamos to the transmitting and receiving chambers, while Lanier quickly got out and made ready the rough khaki suits and equipment they were to take.

It lacked but a quarter-hour of midnight when they had finally donned those suits, each making sure that he was in possession of the small personal kit Milton had designated. This included for each a heavy automatic, a small supply of concentrated foods, and a small case of drugs chosen to counteract the rarer atmosphere and lesser gravity which Milton had been

warned to expect on the red planet. Each had also a strong wrist-watch, the three synchronized exactly with the big laboratory clock.

When they had finished checking up on this equipment the clock's longer hand pointed almost to the figure twelve, and the physicist gestured expressively toward the transmitting chamber. Lanier, though, strode for a moment to one of the laboratory's doors and flung it open. As Randall gazed out with him they could see far out over the tossing sea, dimly lit by the great canopy of the summer stars overhead. Right at the zenith among those stars shone brightest a crimson spark.

"Mars," said Lanier, his voice a half-whisper. "And they're waiting out there for us now—out there where we'll be in minutes!"

"And if they shouldn't be waiting—their receiving chamber not ready—"

But Milton's calm voice came across the room to them: "Zero hour," he said, stepping up into the big

transmitting chamber.

Lanier and Randall slowly followed, and despite himself a slight shudder shook the latter's body as he stepped into the mechanism that in moments would send him flashing out through the great void as impalpable ether-vibrations. Milton and Lanier were standing silent beside him, their eyes on Nelson, who stood watchfully now at the big switchboard beside the chambers, his own gaze on the clock. They saw him touch a stud, and another, and the hum of the great dynamos at the room's end grew loud as the swarming of angry bees.

The clock's longer hand was crawling over the last space to cover the smaller hand. Nelson turned a knob and the battery of great glass tubes broke into brilliant white light, a crackling coming from them. Randall saw the clock's pointer clicking over the last divisions, and as he saw Nelson grip a great switch there came over him a wild impulse to bolt from the transmitting chamber. But then as his thoughts whirled maelstromlike there came a clang from the clock and Nelson flung down the switch in his grasp.

Blinding light seemed to break from all the chamber onto the three; Randall felt himself hurled into nothingness by forces titanic, inconceivable, and then knew no more.

Randall came back to consciousness with a humming sound in his ears and with a sharp pain piercing his lungs at every breath. He felt himself lying on a smooth hard surface, and heard the humming stop and be succeeded by a complete silence. He opened his eyes, drawing himself to his feet as Milton and Lanier were doing, and stared about him.

He was standing with his two friends inside a cubical metal chamber almost exactly the same as the one they had occupied in Milton's laboratory a few moments before. But it was not the same, as their first astounded glance out through its open side told them.

For it was not the laboratory that lay around them, but a vast conelike hall that seemed to Randall's dazed eyes of dimensions illimitable. Its dull-gleaming metal walls slanted up for a thousand feet over their

heads, and through a round aperture at the tip far above and through great doors in the walls came a thin sunlight. At the center of the great hall's circular floor stood the two cubical chambers in one of which the three were, while around the chambers were grouped masses of unfamiliar-looking apparatus.

To Randall's untrained eyes it seemed electrical apparatus of very strange design, but neither he nor Milton nor Lanier paid it but small attention in that first breathless moment. They were gazing in fascinated horror at the scores of creatures who stood silent amid the apparatus and at its switches, gazing back at them. Those creatures were erect and roughly man-like in shape, but they were not human men. They were—the thought blasted to Randall's brain in that horror-filled moment—crocodile-men.

Crocodile-men! It was only so that he could think of them in that moment. For they were terribly like great crocodile shapes that had learned in some way to carry themselves erect upon their hinder limbs. The bodies were not covered with skin, but with green bony plates. The limbs, thick and taloned at their

paw-ends, seemed greater in size and stronger, the upper two great arms and the lower two the legs upon which each walked, while there was but the suggestion of a tail. But the flat head set on the neckless body was most crocodilian of all, with great fanged, hinged jaws projecting forward, and with dark unwinking eyes set back in bony sockets.

Each of the creatures wore on his torso a gleaming garment like a coat of metal scales, with metal belts in which some had shining tubes. They were standing in groups here and there about the mechanisms, the nearest group at a strange big switch-panel not a half-dozen feet from the three men. Milton and Lanier and Randall returned in a tense silence the unwinking stare of the monstrous beings around them.

"The Martians!" Lanier's horror-filled exclamation was echoed in the next instant by Randall's.

"The Martians! God, Milton! They're not like anything we know—they're reptilian!"

Milton's hand clutched his shoulder. "Steady,

Randall," he muttered. "They're terrible enough, God knows—but remember we must seem just as grotesque to them."

The sound of their voices seemed to break the great hall's spell of silence, and they saw the crocodilian Martians before them turning and speaking swiftly to each other in low hissing speech-sounds that were quite unintelligible to the three. Then from the small group nearest them one came forward, until he stood just outside the chamber in which they were.

Randall felt dimly the momentousness of the moment, in which beings of earth and Mars were confronting each other for the first time in the solar system's history. The creature before them opened his great jaws and uttered slowly a succession of sounds that for the moment puzzled them, so different were they from the hissing speech of the others, though with the same sibilance of tone. Again the thing repeated the sounds, and this time Milton uttered an exclamation.

"He's speaking to us!" he cried. "Trying to speak the English that I taught them in our communication! I

caught a word—listen...."

As the creature repeated the sounds, Randall and Lanier started to hear also vaguely expressed in that hissing voice familiar words: "You—are Milton and—others from—earth?"

Milton spoke very clearly and slowly to the creature: "We are those from earth," he said. "And you are the Martians with whom we have communicated?"

"We are those Martians," said the other's hissing voice slowly. "These"—he waved a taloned paw toward those behind him—"have charge of the matter-transmitter and receiver. I am of our ruler's council."

"Ruler?" Milton repeated. "A ruler of all Mars?"

"Of all Mars," the other said. "Our name for him would mean in your words the Martian Master. I am to take you to him."

Milton turned to the other two with face alight with excitement. "These Martians have some supreme

ruler they call the Martian Master," he said quickly; "and we're to go before him. As the first visitors from earth we're of immense importance here."

As he spoke, the Martian official before them had uttered a hissing call, and in answer to it a long shape of shining metal raced into the vast hall and halted beside them. It was like a fifty-foot centipede of metal, its scores of supporting short legs actuated by some mechanism inside the cylindrical body. There was a transparent-walled control room at the front end of that body, and in it a Martian at the controls who snapped open a door from which a metal ladder automatically descended.

The Martian official gestured with a reptilian arm toward the ladder, and Milton and Lanier and Randall moved carefully out of the cube-chamber and across the floor to it, each of their steps being made a short leap forward by the lesser gravity of the smaller planet. They climbed up into the centipede-machine's control room, their guide following, and then as the door snapped shut, the operator of the thing pulled and turned the knob in his grasp and the long

machine scuttled forward with amazing smoothness and speed.

In a moment it was out of the building and into the feeble sunlight of a broad metal-paved street. About them lay a Martian city, seen by their eager eyes for the first time. It was a city whose structures were giant metal cones like that from which they had just come, though none seemed as large as that titanic one. Throngs of the hideous crocodilian Martians were moving busily to and fro in the streets, while among them there scuttled and flashed numbers of the centipede-machines.

As their strange vehicle raced along, Randall saw that the conelike structures were for the most part divided into many levels, and that inside some could be glimpsed ranks of great mechanisms and hurrying Martians tending them. Away to their right across the vast forest of cones that was the city the sun's little disk was shining, and he glimpsed in that direction higher ground covered with a vast tangle of bright crimson jungle that sloped upward from a great, half-glimpsed waterway.

The Martian beside them saw the direction of his gaze and leaned toward him. "No Martians live there," he hissed slowly. "Martians live only in cities where canals meet."

"Then there's no life in those crimson jungles?" Randall asked, repeating the question a moment later more slowly.

"No Martians there, but life—living things," the other told him, searching for words. "But not intelligent, like Martians and you."

He turned to gaze ahead, then pointed. "The Martian Master's cone," he hissed.

The three saw that at the end of the broad metal street down which their vehicle was racing there loomed another titanic cone-structure, fully as large as the mighty one in which they first found themselves. As the centipede-machine swept up to its great door-opening and halted, they descended to the metal paving and then followed their reptilian guide through the opening.

They found themselves in a great hall in which scores of the Martians were coming and going. At the hall's end stood a row of what seemed guards, Martians grasping shining tubes such as they had already glimpsed. These gave way to allow their passage when their conductor uttered a hissing order, and then they were moving down a shorter hall at whose end also were guards. As these sprang aside before them, a great door of massive metal they guarded moved softly upward, disclosing a mighty circular hall or room inside. Their crocodilian guide turned to them.

"The hall of the Martian Master," he hissed.

They passed inside with him. The great hall seemed to extend upward to the giant cone's tip, thin light coming down from an opening there. Upon the dull metal of its looming walls were running friezes of lighter metal, grotesque representations of reptilian shapes that they could but vaguely glimpse. Around the walls stood rank after rank of guards.

At the hall's center was a low dias, and in a semicircle

around and behind it stood a half-hundred great crocodilian shapes. Randall guessed even at the moment that they were the council of which their conductor had named himself a member. But like Milton and Lanier, he had eyes in that first moment only for the dais itself. For on it was—the Martian Master.

Randall heard Milton and Lanier choke with the horror that shook his own heart and brain as he gazed. It was not simply another great crocodilian shape that sat upon that dais. It was a monstrous thing formed by the joining of three of the great reptilian bodies! Three distinct crocodile-like bodies sitting close together upon a metal seat, that had but a single great head. A great, grotesque crocodilian head that bulged backward and to either side, and that rested on the three thick short necks that rose from the triple body! And that head, that triple-bodied thing, was living, its unwinking eyes gazing at the three men!

The Martian Master! Randall felt his brain reel as he gazed at that mind-shattering thing. The Martian

Master—this great head with three bodies! Reason told Randall, even as he strove for sanity, that the thing was but logical, that even on earth biologists had formed multiple-headed creatures by surgery, and that the Martians had done so to combine in one great head, one great brain, the brains of three bodies. Reason told him that the great triple brain inside that bulging head needed the bloodstreams of all three bodies to nourish it, must be a giant intellect indeed, one fitted to be the supreme Martian Master. But reason could not overcome the horror that choked him as he gazed at the awful thing.

A hissing voice sounding before him made him aware that the Martian Master was speaking.

"You are the Earth-beings with whom we communicated, and whom we instructed to build a matter-transmitter and receiver on earth?" the slow voice asked. "You have come safely to Mars by means of that station?"

"We have come safely." Milton's voice was shaken and he could find no other words.

"That is well. Long had we desired to have such a station built on earth, since with it there to flash back and forth between the two worlds is easy. You have come, then, to learn of this world and to take back what you learn to your races?"

"That is why we came." Milton said, more steadily. "We want to stay only hours on this first visit, and then flash back to earth as we came."

The head's awful eyes seemed to consider them. "But when do you intend to go back?" its strange voice asked. "Unless the one at your earth station has its receiver operating at the right moment you will simply flash on endlessly as radio waves—will be annihilated."

Milton found the courage to smile. "We started from earth at our midnight exactly, and at midnight exactly twenty-four earth hours later, we are to flash back and the receiver will be awaiting us."

There was silence when he had said that, a silence that seemed to Randall's strained mind to have

become suddenly tense, sinister. The great triple-bodied creature before them considered them again, its eyes moving over them, and when it again spoke the hissing words came very slowly.

"Twenty-four earth hours," it said; "and then your receiver on earth will be awaiting you. That time we can measure to the moment, and that is well. For it is not you three Earth-beings who will flash back to earth when that moment comes! It will be Martians, the first of our Martian masses who have waited for ages for that moment and who will begin then our conquest of the earth!

"Yes, Earth-beings, our great plan comes to its end now at last! At last! Age on age, prisoned on this dying, arid world, we have desired the earth that by right of power shall be ours, have sought for ages to communicate with its beings. You finally heard us, you hearkened to us, you built the matter-transmitting and receiving station on earth that was the one thing needed for our plan. For when the matter-receiver of that station is turned on in twenty-four of your hours, and ready to receive matter flashes from here, it will

be the first of our millions who will flash at last to earth!

"I, the Martian Master, say it. Those first to go shall seize that matter-receiver on earth when first they appear there, shall build other and larger receivers, and through them within days all our Martian hordes shall have been flashed to earth! Shall have poured out over it and conquered with our weapons your weak races of Earth-beings, who cannot stand before us, and whose world you have delivered at last into our hands!"

For a moment, when the great monster's hissing voice had ceased, Milton and Randall and Lanier gazed toward it as though petrified, the whole unearthly scene spinning about them. And then, through the thick silence, the thin sound of Milton's voice:

"Our world—our earth—delivered to the Martians, and by us! God—no!"

With that last cry of agonized comprehension and horror, Milton did what surely had never any in the

great hall expected, leaped onto the dais with a single spring toward the Martian Master! Randall heard a hundred wild hissing cries break from about him, saw the crocodilian forms of guards and council rushing forward even as he and Lanier sprang after Milton, and then glimpsed shining tubes levelled from which brilliant shafts of dazzling crimson light or force were stabbing toward them!

To Randall the moment that followed was but a split-second flash and whirl of action. As his earthly muscles took him forward with Lanier after Milton in a great leap to the dais, he was aware of the brilliant red rays stabbing behind him closely, and knew that only the tremendous size of his leap had taken him past them. In the succeeding instant he was made aware of what he had escaped, for the hastily-loosed rays struck squarely a group of three or four Martian guards rushing to the dais from the opposite side, and they vanished from view with a sharp detonation as though clicked out of existence!

Randall was not to know then, that the red rays were ones that annihilated matter by neutralizing or

damping the matter-vibrations in the ether. But he did know that no more rays were loosed, for by then he and Milton and Lanier were on the dais and were wrapped in a hurricane combat with the guards that had rushed between them and the Martian Master.

Gleaming fangs—great scaled forms—reaching talons—it was all a wild phantasmagoria of grotesque forms spinning around him as he struck with all the power of his earthly muscles and felt crocodilian forms staggering and going down beneath his frenzied blows. He heard the roar of an automatic close beside him in the melee as Milton remembered at last through the red haze of his fury the weapon he carried, but before either Randall or Lanier could reach their own weapons a new wave of crocodilian forms had poured onto them that by sheer pressing weight held them helpless, to be disarmed.

Hissing orders sounded, the arms and legs of the three were tightly grasped by great taloned paws, and the masses of Martians about them melted back from the dais. Held each by two great creatures, Milton and Randall and Lanier faced again the triple-bodied

Martian Master, who in all that wild moment of struggle appeared not to have changed his position. The big monster's black eyes stared unmovedly down at them.

"You Earth-beings seem of lower intelligence even than we thought," his hissing voice informed them. "And those weapons—crude, very crude."

Milton, his face set, spoke back: "It may be that you will find human weapons of some power if your hordes reach earth," he said.

"But what compared with the power of ours?" the other asked coldly. "And since our scientists even now devise new weapons to annihilate the earth's races, I think they would be glad of three of those races to experiment with now. The one use we can make of you, certainly."

The creature turned its bulging head a little towards the guards who held the three men, and uttered a brief hissing order. Instantly the six Martians, grasping the three tightly, marched them across the

great hall and through a different door than that by which they had entered.

They were taken down a narrow corridor that turned sharply twice as they went on. Randall saw that it was lit by squares inset in the walls that glowed with crimson light. It came to him as they marched on that night must be upon the Martian city without, since the sun had been sinking when they had crossed it in the centipede-machine.

Through what seemed an ante-room they were taken, and then into a long hall instantly recognizable as a laboratory. There were many glowing squares illuminating it, and narrow windows high in the wall gave them a glimpse of the city outside, a pattern of crimson lights. Long metal tables and racks filled the big room's farther end, while along the walls were ranged shining mechanisms of unfamiliar and grotesque appearance. Fully a score of the crocodilian Martians were busy in the room, some intent on their work at the racks and tables, others operating some of the strange machines.

The guards conducted the three to an open space by the wall, below one of the high window-openings and between two great cylindrical mechanisms. Then, while five of their number held the three men prisoned in that space by the threat of their levelled ray-tubes, the other moved toward one of the busy Martian scientists and held with him a brief interchange of hissing speech.

Milton leaned to whisper to the other two: "We've got to get out of this while we're still living," he whispered. "You heard the Martian Master—in constructing that matter-receiver on earth, we've opened a door through which all the Martian millions will pour onto our world!"

"It's useless, Milton," said Randall dully. "Even if we got clear of this the Martians will be at their matter-transmitter in hordes when the moment comes to flash back to earth."

"I know that, but we've got to try," the other insisted. "If we or some of us could get clear of this, we might in some way hide near the matter-transmitter until

the moment came and then fight to it."

"But how to get out of the hands of these, even?" asked Lanier, nodding toward the alert guards before them.

"There's but one way," Milton whispered swiftly. "Our earthly muscles would enable us, I think, to get through this window-opening above us in a leap, if we had a moment's chance. Well, whichever of us they take to experiment with or examine first, must make a struggle or disturbance that will turn the guards' attention for a moment and give the other two a chance to make the attempt!"

"One to stay and the other two to get away...." Randall said slowly; but Milton's tense whisper interrupted:

"It's the only way, and even then a thousand to one chance! But it's we who have opened this gate for the Martian invasion of our world and it's we who must—"

Before he could finish, the approach of hissing voices told them that the leader of the six guards and the

Martian who seemed the chief of the experimenters in the hall were nearing them. The three men stood silent and tense as the two crocodilian monsters stopped before them. The scientist, who carried in his metal-belt, instead of a ray-tube a compact case of instruments, surveyed them as though in curiosity.

He came closer, his quick reptilian eyes taking in with evident interest every feature of their bodily appearance. Intuitively the three knew that one of them was to be chosen for a first investigation by the Martian scientists, and that that one would have not even the slender hope of escape open to the other two. A strange lottery of life and death!

Randall saw the creature's gaze turn from one to another of them, and then heard the hiss of his voice as he pointed a taloned paw toward Milton. Instantly two of the guards had seized Milton and had jerked him out from the wall, the other guards holding back Randall and Lanier with threatening tubes. It was upon Milton that the fatal choice had fallen!

Randall and Lanier made together a half-movement

forward, but Milton, a tense message in his eyes, forced them back. The guards who held the physicist led him, at the direction of the Martian scientist, toward a great upright frame at the room's far end, upon which were clustered a score of dial-indicators. From these flexible cords led; and now the scientists began attaching these by clips to various spots on Milton's body. Some mechanical examination of his bodily characteristics were apparently to be made. Milton shot suddenly a glance at the two by the wall, and his head nodded in an almost imperceptible signal. The muscles of Lanier and Randall tensed.

Then abruptly Milton seemed to go mad. He shouted aloud in a terrible voice, and at the same moment tore from him the cords just attached, his fists striking out then at the amazed Martians around him. As they leaped back from that sudden explosion of activity and sound on Milton's part the guards before Randall and Lanier whirled instinctively for an instant toward it. And in that instant the two had leaped.

It was upward they leaped, with all the force of their earthly muscles, toward the big window-opening a

half-dozen feet in the wall above them. Like released steel springs they sat up, and Randall heard the thump of their feet as they struck the opening's sill, heard wild cries suddenly coming from beneath them, as the guards turned back toward them. Crimson rays clove up like light toward them, but the instant's surprise had been enough, and in it they had leaped on and through the opening, into the outside night!

As they shot downward and struck the metal paving outside, Randall heard a wild babble of cries from inside. A moment he and Lanier gazed frenziedly around them, then were running with great leaps along the base of the building from which they had just escaped.

In the darkness of night the Martian city stretched away to their right, its massive dark cone-structures outlined by points of glowing ruddy light here and there upon them. Beside the city's metal streets were illuminated by the brilliant field of stars overhead and by the soft light of the two moons, one much larger than the other, that moved among those stars.

Along the street crocodilian Martians were coming and going still, though in small numbers, there being but few in sight in the dim-lit street's length. Lanier pointed ahead as they leaped onward.

"Straight onward, Randall!" he jerked. "There seem fewer of the Martians this way!"

"But the great cone of the matter-station is the other way!" Randall exclaimed.

"We can't risk making for it now!" cried the other. "We've got to keep clear of them until the alarm is over. Hear them now?"

For even as they leaped forward a rising clamor of hissing cries and rush of feet was coming from behind as scores of Martians poured out into the darkness from the great cone-building. The two fugitives had passed by then from the shadow of the mighty structure, and as they ran along the broad metal street toward the shadow of the next cone, through the light of the moons above, they heard higher cries and then glimpsed narrow shafts of crimson force

cleaving the night around them.

Randall, as the deadly rays drove past him, heard the low detonating sound made by their destruction of the air in their path, and the inrush of new air. But in the misty and uncertain moonlight the rays could not be loosed accurately, and before they could be swept sidewise to annihilate the two fleeing men they had gained, with a last great leap, the shadow of the next building.

On they ran, the clatter of the Martian pursuit growing more noisy behind them. Randall heard Lanier gasping with each great leap, and felt himself at every breath a knife of pain stabbing through his lungs, the rarified atmosphere of the red planet taking its toll. Again from the darkness behind them the crimson rays clove, but this time were wide of their mark.

With every moment the clamor of pursuit seemed growing louder, the alarm spreading out over the Martian city and arousing it. As they raced past cone after cone, Randall knew even the increased power of

their muscles could not long aid them against the exhaustion which the thin air was imposing on them. His thoughts spun for a moment to Milton, in the laboratory behind, and then back to their own desperate plight.

Abruptly shapes loomed in the misty light before them! A group of three great Martians, reptilian shapes that had been coming toward them and had stopped for an instant in amazement at sight of the running pair. There was no time to halt themselves, to evade the three, and with a mutual instinct Lanier and Randall seized together the last expedient open to them. They ran straight forward toward the astounded three, and when a half-score feet from them, leaped with all their force upward and toward them, their tensed bodies flying through the air with feet outstretched before them.

Then they had struck the group of three with feet-foremost, and with the impetus of that great leap had knocked them sprawling to this side and that, while with a supreme effort the two kept their balance and leaped on. The cries of the three added to the din

behind them as they threw themselves forward.

They flung themselves past a last cone building to halt for an instant in utter amazement despite the nearing pursuit. Before them were no more streets and structures, but a huge smooth-flowing waterway! It gleamed in the moonlight and lay at right angles across their path, seeming to flow along the Martian city's edge.

"A canal!" cried Lanier. "It's one of the canals that meet at this city and flow around it! We're trapped—we've reached the city's edge!"

"Not yet!" Randall gasped. "Look!"

As he pointed to the left Lanier shot a glance there; and then both of them were running in that direction, along the smooth metal paving that bordered the mighty canal. They came to what Randall had seen, a mighty metal arch that soared out over the waterway to its opposite side. A bridge!

They were on it, were racing up the smooth incline of

it. Randall glanced back as they reached the arch's summit. From that height the city stretched far away behind them, a lace of crimson lights in the night. He glimpsed the gleam of the giant waterway that encircled the city completely, one that was fed by other canals from far away that emptied into it, the great city's vital water-supply brought thus from this world's melting polar snows.

There were moving lights behind now, too, pouring out onto the metal paving by the waterway, moving to and fro as though in confusion, with a babel of hissing cries. It was not until Randall and Lanier were running down the descending incline of the great arched bridge, though, that the lights and shouts of their pursuers began to move up on that bridge after them.

Running off the bridge's smooth way, the two found themselves stumbling on through the darkness over more metal paving, and then over soft ground. There were no lights or buildings or sounds of any sort on this farther side of the great waterway. A tall dark wall seemed suddenly to loom up out of the darkness

some distance ahead of the two.

"The crimson jungle!" Randall cried. "The jungles we glimpsed from the city! It's a chance to hide!"

They raced toward the protecting blackness of that wall of vegetation. They reached it, flung themselves inside, just as the pursuing Martians, a mass of running crocodilian shapes and of great racing centipede-machines, swept up over the bridge's arch behind. A moment the two halted in the thick vegetation's shelter, gasping for breath, then were moving forward through the jungle's denser darkness.

Thick about them and far above them towered the masses of strange trees and plant life through which they made their way. Randall could see but dimly the nature of these plant-forms, but could make out that they were grotesque and unearthly in appearance, all leafless, and with masses of thin tendrils branching from them instead of leaves. He realized that it was only beside the arid planet's great canals that this profusion of plant life had sufficient moisture for existence, and that it was the broad bands of jungle

bordering the canals that had made the latter visible to earth's astronomers.

Lanier and he halted for a moment to listen. The thick jungle about them seemed quite silent. But from behind there came through it a vague tumult of hissing calls; and then, as they glimpsed red flashes far behind, they heard the crashing of great masses of the leafless trees.

"The rays!" whispered Lanier. "They're beating through the jungle with them and the centipede-machines after us!"

They paused no more, but pushed on through the thick growths with renewed urgency. Now and then, as they passed through small clearings, Randall glimpsed overhead the fast-moving nearer moon and slower sailing farther moon of Mars, moving across the steady stars. In some of these clearings they saw, too, strange great openings burrowed in the ground as though by some strange animal.

The crashing clamor of the Martians beating the

jungle behind was coming close, ever closer, and as they came to still another misty-lit clearing, Lanier paused, with face white and tense.

"They're closing in on us!" he said. "They're hunting us down by beating the jungle with those centipede-machines, and even if we escape them we're getting farther from the city and the matter-station each moment!"

Randall's eyes roved desperately around the clearing; and then, as they fell on a group of the great burrowed openings that seemed present everywhere about them, he uttered an exclamation.

"These holes! We can hide in one until they've passed over us, and then steal back to the city!"

Lanier's eyes lit. "It's a chance!"

They sprang toward the openings. They were each of some four feet diameter, extending indefinitely downward as though the mouths of tunnels. In a moment Randall was lowering himself into one,

Lanier after him. The tunnel in which they were, they found, curved to one side a few feet below the surface. They crawled down this curve until they were out of sight of the opening above. They crouched silent, then, listening.

There came down to them the dull, distant clamor of the centipede-machines crashing through the jungle, cutting a way with rays, their clamor growing ever louder. Then Randall, who was lowest in the tunnel, turned suddenly as there came to him a strange rustling sound from *beneath* him. It was as though some crawling or creeping thing was moving in the tunnel below them!

He grasped the arm of Lanier, beside and a little above him, to warn him, but the words he was about to whisper never were uttered. For at this moment a big shapeless living thing seemed to flash up toward them through the darkness from beneath, cold ropelike tentacles gripped both tightly; and then in an instant they were being dragged irresistibly down into the lightless tunnel's depths!

As they were pulled swiftly downward into the tunnel by the tentacles that grasped them an involuntary cry of horror came from Randall and Lanier alike. They twisted frantically in the cold grip that held them, but found it of the quality of steel. And as Randall twisted in it to strike frantically down through the darkness at whatever thing of horror held them, his clenched fist met but the cold smooth skin of some big, soft-bodied creature!

Down—down—remorselessly they were being drawn farther into the black depths of the tunnel by the great thing crawling down below them. Again and again the two twisted and struck, but could not shake its hold. In sheer exhaustion they ceased to struggle, dragged helplessly farther down.

Was it minutes or hours, Randall wondered afterward, of that horrible progress downward, that passed before they glimpsed light beneath? A feeble glow, hardly discernible, it was, and as they went lower still he saw that it was caused by the tunnel passing through a strata of radio-active rock that gave off the faint light. In that light they glimpsed for the first

time the horror dragging them downward.

It was a huge worm creature! A thing like a giant angleworm, three feet or more in thickness and thrice that in length, its great body soft and cold and worm-like. From the end nearest them projected two long tentacles with which it had gripped the two men and was dragging them down the tunnel after it! Randall glimpsed a mouth-aperture in the tentacled end of the worm body also, and two scarlike marks above it, placed like eyes, although eyes the monstrous thing had not.

But a moment they glimpsed it and then were in darkness again as the tunnel passed through the radio-active strata and lower. The horror of that moment's glimpse, though, made them strike out in blind repulsion, but relentlessly the creature dragged them after it.

"God!" It was Lanier's panting cry as they were dragged on. "This worm monster—we're hundreds of feet below the surface!"

Randall sought to reply, but his voice choked. The air about them was close and damp, with an overpowering earthy smell. He felt consciousness leaving him.

A gleam of soft light—they were passing more radioactive patches. He felt the wild convulsive struggles of Lanier against the thing; and then suddenly the tunnel ended, debouched into a far-stretching, low-ceilinged cavity. It was feebly illuminated by radioactive patches here and there in walls and ceiling, and as the monster that held them halted on entering the cavity, Randall and Lanier lay in its grip and stared across the weird place with intensified horror.

For it was swarming with countless worm monsters! All were like the one who held them, thick long worm bodies with projecting tentacles and with black eyeless faces. They were crawling to and fro in this cavern far beneath the surface, swarming in hordes around and over each other, pouring in and out of the awful place from countless tunnels that led upward and downward from it!

A world of worm monsters, beneath the surface of the Martian jungles! As Randall stared across that swarming, dim-lit cave of horror, physically sick at sight of it, he remembered the countless tunnel openings they had glimpsed in their flight through the jungle, and remembered the remark of the Martian who had first guided them across the city, that in the jungles were living things, of a sort. These were the things, worm monsters whose unthinkable networks of tunnels and burrows formed beneath the surface a veritable worm world!

"Randall!" It was Lanier's thick exclamation. "Randall—those scar-marks on their—faces—you see—?"

"See?"

"Those marks! These creatures had eyes once but must have been forced down here by the Martians. These may once have been—ages ago—human!"

At that thought Randall felt horror overcoming his senses. He was aware that the great worm monster holding them was dragging them forward through the

cavern, that others of the swarms there were crowding around them, feeling them blindly with their tentacles, helping to drag them forward.

Half-carried and half-dragged they went, scores of tentacles now holding them, great worm shapes crawling forward on all sides of them and accompanying them along the cavern's length. He glimpsed worm monsters here and there emerging from the upward tunnels with masses of strange plant stuff in their grasp that others blindly devoured. His senses reeled from the suffocating air, the great cavity being but a half-score feet in height, burrowed from the damp earth by these numberless things.

The faint, strange light of the radio-active patches showed him that they were approaching the cavern's end. Tunnels opened from its end as from all its walls and floor, and into one Randall was dragged by the creatures, one before and one behind, grasping him, and Lanier being brought behind him in the same way. In the close tunnel the heavy air was deadly, and he was but partly conscious when again, after moments of crawling along it, he felt himself dragged

out into another cavern.

This earth-walled cavity, though, seemed to extend farther than the first, though of the same height as the first and with a few radio-active illuminating patches. In it seethed and swarmed literally hundreds on hundreds of the worm monsters, a sea of great crawling bodies. Randall and Lanier saw that they were being carried and dragged now toward the farther end of this larger cavity.

As they approached it, pushing through the swarming creatures who felt them with inquisitive tentacles as their captors took them forward, the two men saw that a great shape was looming up in the faint light at the cave's far end. In moments they were close enough to discern its nature, and a horror and awe filled them at sight of it more intense than they had yet felt.

For the looming shape was a huge earthen image or statue of a worm! It was shaped with a childish crudeness from the solid earth, a giant earthen worm shape whose body looped across the cave's end, and

whose tentacled head or front end was reared upward to the cavity's roof. Before this awful earthen shape was a section of the cave's floor higher than the rest, and on it a great crudely shaped rectangular earthen block.

"Lanier—that shape!" whispered Randall in his horror. "That earthen image, made by these creatures—it's the worm god they've made for themselves!"

"A worm god!" Lanier repeated, staring toward it as they were dragged nearer. "Then that block...."

"Its altar!" Randall exclaimed. "These things have some dim spark of intelligence or memory! They're brought us here to—"

Before he could finish, the clutching tentacles of the worm monsters about them had dragged them up onto the raised floor beside the block, beneath the looming earthen worm shape. There they glimpsed for the first time in the faint light another who stood there held tightly by the tentacles of two worm monsters. It was a Martian!

The big crocodilian shape was apparently a prisoner like themselves, captured and brought down from above. His reptilian eyes surveyed Lanier and Randall quickly as they were dragged up and held beside him, but he took no other interest. To the two men, at the moment, it seemed that his great crocodilian shape was human, almost, so much more man-like was it than the grotesque worm monsters before them.

With a half-dozen of the creatures holding the two men and the Martian tightly, another great worm monster crawled to the edge of the raised earth floor in front of the giant worm god's image, and then reared up the first third of his thick body into the air. By then the great, faint-lit cavity stretching before them was filled with countless numbers of the monsters, pouring into it from all the tunnels that opened into it from above and below, packing it thick with their grotesque bodies as far as the eye could reach in the dim light.

They were seething and crawling in that great mass; but as the worm monster on the elevation upreared, all in the cavity seemed suddenly to quiet. Then the

upreared eyeless thing began to move his long tentacles. Very slowly at first he waved them back and forth, and slowly the masses of monsters in the cavity, all turned by some sense toward him, did likewise, the cavity becoming a forest of upraised tentacles waving rhythmically back and forth in unison with those of the leader.

Back and forth—back and forth—Randall felt caught in some torturing nightmare as he watched the countless tentacle-feelers waving thus from one side to the other. It was a ceremony, he knew—some strange rite springing perhaps from dim memory alone, that these worm monsters carried out thus before the looming shape of their worm god. Only the six that held the three captives never relaxed their grip.

Still on and on went the strange and senseless rite. By then the close, damp air of that cavity far beneath Mars' surface was sinking Randall and Lanier deeper into a half-consciousness. The Martian beside them never moved or spoke. The upstretched tentacles of the leader and of the great worm horde before him

never ceased swaying rhythmically from side to side.

Randall, half-hypnotized by those swaying tentacles and but semi-conscious by then, could only estimate afterward how long that grotesque rite went on.

Hours it must have endured, he knew, hours in which each opening of his eyes revealed only the dimly-illuminated cavern, the worm monsters that filled it, the forest of tentacles waving in unison. It was only toward the end of those hours that he noticed vaguely that the tentacles were waving faster and faster.

And as the tentacles of leader and worm horde waved alike ever more swiftly an atmosphere of growing excitement and expectation seemed to hold the horde. At last the upstretched feelers were whipping back and forth almost too swiftly for the eye to follow. Then abruptly the worm leader ceased the motion himself, and while the horde before him continued it, turned and crawled to the three captives.

In an instant, as though in answer to a second command, the two worm monsters who held the Martian dragged him forward toward the great

earthen block before the worm god's image. Two others of the creatures came from the side, and the four swiftly stretched the Martian flat on the block's top, each of the four grasping with their tentacles one of his four taloned limbs. They seemed to hesitate then, the worm leader beside them, the tentacles of the horde waving swiftly still.

Abruptly the tentacles of the leader flashed up as though in a signal. There was a dull ripping sound, and in that moment Randall and Lanier saw the Martian on the block torn literally limb from limb by the four great worm monsters who had held his four limbs!

The tentacles of the horde waved suddenly with increased, excited swiftness at that. Randall shrank in horror.

"They've brought us here for that!" he cried. "To sacrifice us on that altar that way to their worm god!"

But Lanier too had cried out, appalled, as he saw that awful sacrifice, and both strained madly against the

grip of the worm creatures. Their struggles were in vain, and then in answer to another unspoken command the two monsters that held Randall were dragging him also to the earthen altar!

He felt himself gripped by the four great creatures around the block, felt as he struggled with his last strength that he was being stretched out on the block, each of the four at one of its corners grasping one of his limbs. He heard Lanier's mad cries as though from a great distance, glimpsed as he was held thus on his back the great shape of the earthen worm god reared over him, and then glimpsed the leader of the monsters rearing beside him.

The dull sound of the swift-waving tentacles of the horde came to him, there was a tense moment of agony of waiting, and then the tentacles of the leader flashed up in the signal!

But at the same moment Randall felt his limbs released by the four monsters that had held them! There seemed sudden wild confusion in the great cave. The strange rite broke off; the horde of worm

monsters crawled frantically this way and that in it. Randall slipped off the block; staggered to his feet.

The worm monsters in the cave were swarming toward the downward tunnel openings! The two captives forgotten, the creatures were pouring in crawling, fighting swarms toward those openings. And then, as Randall and Lanier stared stupefied, there came a red flash from one of the upward tunnels and a brilliant crimson ray stabbed down and mowed a path of annihilation in the cave's earthen side!

The two heard great thumping sounds from above, saw the tunnels leading from above becoming suddenly many times greater in size as red rays flashed down along them to gouge the tunnel's walls. Then down from those enlarged tunnels there were bursting long shining shapes, great centipede-machines crawling down the tunnels which their rays made larger before them! And as the centipede-machines burst down into the cavern their crimson rays stabbed right and left to cut paths of annihilation among the worms.

"The Martians!" Lanier cried. "They didn't find us above—they knew we must have been taken by these things—and they've come down after us!"

"Back, Lanier!" Randall shouted. "Quick, before they see us, behind this—"

As he spoke he was jerking Lanier with him behind the looming earthen statue of the great worm god. Crouched there between the statue and the cave's wall they were hidden precariously from the view of those in the cavern. And now that cavern had become a scene of horror unthinkable as the centipede-machines pouring down into it blasted the frantically crawling worm monsters with their rays.

The worm monsters attempted no resistance, but sought only to escape into their downward tunnels, and in moments those not caught by the rays had vanished in the openings. But the centipede-machines, after racing swiftly around the cavity, were following them, were going down into those downward tunnels also, their rays blasting down ahead of each to make the tunnel large enough for

them to follow.

In a moment all but one had vanished down into the openings, the remaining one having its front or head jammed in one of the openings from the failure of its operator to blast a large enough opening before him. As Lanier and Randall watched tensely they saw the machine's control room door open and a Martian descend. He inspected the tunnel opening in which his vehicle was jammed, then with a hand ray-tube began to disintegrate the earth around that opening to free his machine.

Randall clutched his companion's arm. "That machine!" he whispered. "If we could capture it, it would give us a chance to get back to the city—to Milton and the matter-transmitter!"

Lanier started, then nodded swiftly. "We'll chance it," he whispered. "For our twenty-four hours here must be almost up."

They hesitated a moment, then crept forward from behind the great earthen statue. The Martian had his

back to them, his attention on the freeing of his mechanism. Across the dim-lit cavern they crept softly, and were within a dozen feet of the Martian when some sound made him wheel quickly to confront them with the deadly tube. But even as he whirled the two had leaped.

The force of their leap sent them flying through that dozen feet of space to strike the Martian at the moment his tube levelled. One hissing call he uttered as they struck him, and then with all his strength Lanier had grasped the crocodilian body and bent it backward. Something in it snapped, and the Martian collapsed limply. The two looked wildly around.

Nothing showed that the Martian's call had been heard, and after a moment's glance that showed the head of the centipede machine already freed, they were clambering up into its control room, closing the door. Randall seized the knob with which he had seen the machines operated. As he pulled it toward him the machine moved across the tunnel opening and raced smoothly over the cavern's floor. As he turned the knob the machine turned swiftly in the same

direction.

He headed the long mechanism toward one of the upward-curving tunnels which the Martians had blasted larger in descending. They were almost to it when there flashed up into the cavity from one of the downward tunnel openings a centipede-machine, and then another, and another. The Martians in their transparent-windowed control rooms took in at a glance the dead crocodilian on the floor, and then the three great machines were darting toward that of Randall and Lanier.

"The Martian we killed!" Randall cried. "They heard his call and are coming after us!"

"Turn to the wall!" Lanier shouted to him. "I have the rays—"

At that moment there was a clicking beside Randall and he glimpsed Lanier pulling forth two small grips he had found, then saw that two crimson rays were stabbing from tubes in their machine's front toward the others even as their own rays darted back. The

beams that had been loosed toward them grazed past them as Randall whirled their machine to the wall, and he saw one of the three attacking mechanisms vanish as Lanier's beams struck it.

Around—back—with instinctive, lightninglike motions he whirled their centipede-machine in the great dim-lit cave as the two remaining ones leapt again to the attack. Their rays shot right and left to catch the two men's vehicle in a trap of death, and as Randall swung their own mechanism straight ahead he glimpsed at the cavern's far end the great earthen worm god still upreared.

On either side of them the red beams burned as they leapt forward, but as though running a gauntlet of death Randall kept the machine racing forward in the succeeding second until the two others loomed on either side of it. Then Lanier's beams were driving in turn to right and left of them and the two vanished as though by magic as they were struck.

"Up to the surface!" Lanier cried, his eyes on the glowing dial of his wrist-watch. "We've been held

hours here—we've but a half-hour or more before earth midnight!"

Randall sent their machine racing again toward one of the upward tunnels, and as the long mechanism began to climb smoothly up the darkness he heard Lanier agonizing beside him.

"God, if we have only enough time to get to that matter-transmitter before the Martians start flashing to earth through it!"

"But Milton?" Randall cried. "We don't know whether he's alive or dead! We can't leave him!"

"We must!" said Lanier solemnly. "Our duty's to the earth now, man, to the world that we alone can save from the Martian invasion and conquest! At the hour of twelve Nelson will have the matter-receiver turned on and at that hour the Martian will start flashing to earth—unless we prevent!"

Suddenly Randall grasped the knob in his hands more tightly as light showed above them. They had been

climbing upward through the enlarged tunnel at their machine's highest speed, and now as the tunnel curved the light grew stronger. Suddenly they were emerging into the thin sunlight of the Martian day.

In the crimson jungle about them were many Martians, milling excitedly to and fro, and other centipede-machines that were blasting their way down through tunnels to the worm world beneath.

Randall and Lanier, breathless, crouched low in the transparent-windowed control room as they sent their mechanism racing through this scene of swarming activity. Both gasped as one of the centipede-machines clashed against their own in passing, its Martian driver turning to stare after them. But there came no alarm, and in a moment they had passed out of the swarm of Martians and machines and were heading through the jungle in the direction of the city.

Through the weird red vegetation their mechanism raced with them, Randall holding it at its highest speed, and in minutes they came out of the jungle and were racing over the clear space between it and the

great canal. Beyond that canal loomed into the thin sunlight the clustering cones of the mighty Martian city, two towering above all the others—the cone of the Martian Master and the other cone in which was the matter-transmitter and receiver.

It was toward the latter that Lanier pointed. "Head straight toward that cone, Randall—we've but minutes left!"

They were racing now up over the great arch of the canal's metal bridge, and then scuttling smoothly off it and along the broad metal street through which they had fled in darkness hours before. In it Martians and centipede-machines were coming and going in great numbers, but none noticed the human forms of the two crouched low in their mechanism's control room.

They were rushing then toward the looming cone of the Martian Master. As they flashed past it Randall saw Lanier's face working, knew the desire that tore at him even as at himself to burst inside and ascertain whether or not Milton still lived in the laboratories

from which they had fled. But they were past it, faces white and grim, were rushing on through the Martian city at reckless speed toward the other mighty cone.

It seemed that all in the great city were heading toward the same goal, streams of crocodilian Martians and masses of shining centipede-machines filling the streets as they moved toward it. As they came closer to the mighty structure, hearts pounding, they saw that around it surged a mighty mass of Martians and machines. The hordes waiting to be released through the matter-transmitter inside upon the unsuspecting earth!

"Try to get the machine inside!" Lanier whispered tensely. "If we can smash that transmitter yet...."

Randall nodded grimly. "Keep ready at the ray-tubes," he told the other.

As unobtrusively as possible he sent their long mechanism worming forward through the vast throng of machines and Martians, toward the great cone's door. Crouching low, the hands of their watches

closing fast toward the twelfth figure, they edged forward in the long machine. At last they were moving through the mighty door, into the cone's interior.

They moved slowly on through the mass of machines and crocodile forms inside, then halted. For at the great crowd's center was a clear circle hundreds of feet across, and as Randall gazed across it his heart seemed to leap once and then stop.

At the center of that clear circle rose the two cubical metal chambers of the matter-transmitter and receiver. The transmitting chamber, they saw, was flooded with humming force, with white light pouring from its inner walls. It was already in operation, and the masses of Martians in the great cone were only waiting for the moment to sound when the receiver on earth would be operating also. Then they would pour into the chamber to be flashed in masses across the gulf to earth! The eyes of all in the cone seemed turned toward an erect dial-mechanism beside the chambers which was clocklike in appearance, and that would mark the moment when the first Martian could enter the transmitting-chamber and flash out.

A little distance from the two metal chambers stood a low dais on which there sat the hideous triple-bodied form of the Martian Master. Around him were the massed members of his council, waiting like him for the start of their age-planned invasion of earth. And beside the dais was a figure between two crocodilian guards at sight of whom Randall forgot all else.

"Milton! My God, Lanier, it's Milton!"

"Milton! They've brought him here to torture or kill him if they find he's lied about the moment they could flash to earth!"

Milton! And at sight of him something snapped in Randall's brain.

With a single motion of the knob he sent their centipede-machine crashing out into the clear circle at the mighty cone's center. A wild uproar of hissing cries broke from all the thousands in it as he sent the mechanism whirling toward the dais of the Martian Master. He saw the crocodilian forms there scattering blindly before him, and then as his rays drove out and

spun and stabbed in mad figures of crimson death through the astounded Martian masses he saw Milton looking up toward them, crying out crazily to them as his two guards loosed him for the moment.

A high call from the Martian Master ripped across the hall and was answered by a shattering roar of hissing voices as Martians and machines surged madly toward them. Randall and Lanier in a single leap were out of the centipede-machine, and in an instant had half-dragged Milton with them in a great leap up to the edge of the humming transmitting chamber.

Milton was shouting hoarsely to them over the wild uproar. To enter that transmitting chamber before the destined moment was annihilation, to be flashed out with no receiver on earth awaiting them. They turned, struck with all their strength at the first Martians rushing up to them. No rays flashed, for a ray loosed would destroy the chamber behind them that was the one gate for the Martians to the world they would invade. But as the Martian Master's high call hissed again all the countless crocodilian forms in the great cone were rushing toward them.

Braced at the very edge of the humming, light-filled chamber, Randall and Lanier and Milton struck madly at the Martians surging up toward them. Randall seemed in a dream. A score of taloned paws clutched him from beneath; scaled forms collapsed under his insane blows.

The whole vast cone and surging reptilian hordes seemed spinning at increasing speed around him. As his clenched fists flashed with waning strength he glimpsed crocodilian forms swarming up on either side of them, glimpsed Lanier down, talons reaching toward him, Milton fighting over him like a madman. Another moment would see it ended—reptilian arms reaching in scores to drag him down—Milton jerking Lanier half to his feet. The Martian Master's call sounded—and then came a great clanging sound at which the Martian hordes seemed to freeze for an instant motionless, at which Milton's voice reached him in a supreme cry.

"Randall—the transmitter!"

For in that instant Milton was leaping back with

Lanier, and as Randall with his last strength threw himself backward with them into the humming transmitting-chamber's brilliant light, he heard a last frenzied roar of hissing cries from the Martian hordes about them. Then as the brilliant light and force from the chamber's walls smote them, Randall felt himself hurled into blackness inconceivable, that smashed like a descending curtain across his brain.

The curtain of blackness lifted for a moment. He was lying with Milton and Lanier in another chamber whose force beat upon them. He saw a yellow-lit room instead of the great cone—saw the tense, anxious face of Nelson at the switch beside them. He strove to move, made to Nelson a gesture with his arm that seemed to drain all strength and life from him; and then, as in answer to it Nelson drove up the switch and turned off the force of the matter-receiver in which they lay, the black curtain descended on Randall's brain once more.

Two hours later it was when Milton and Randall and Lanier and Nelson turned to the laboratory's door. They paused to glance behind them. Of the great

matter-transmitter and receiver, of the apparatus that had crowded the laboratory, there remained now but wreckage.

For that had been their first thought, their first task, when the astounded Nelson had brought the three back to consciousness and had heard their amazing tale. They had wrecked so completely the matter-station and its actuating apparatus that none could ever have guessed what a mechanism of wonder the laboratory a short time before had held.

The cubical chambers had been smashed beyond all recognition, the dynamos were masses of split metal and fused wiring, the batteries of tubes were shattered, the condensers and transformers and wiring demolished. And it had only been when the last written plans and blue-prints of the mechanism had been burned that Milton and Randall and Lanier had stopped to allow their exhausted bodies a moment of rest.

Now as they paused at the laboratory's door, Lanier reached and swung it open. Together, silent, they

gazed out.

It all seemed to Randall exactly as upon the night before. The shadowy masses in the darkness, the heaving, dim-lit sea stretching far away before them, the curtain of summer stars stretched across the heavens. And, sinking westward amid those stars, the red spark of Mars toward which as though toward a magnet all their eyes had turned.

Milton was speaking. "Up there it has shone for centuries—ages—a crimson spot of light. And up there the Martians have been watching, watching—until at last we opened to them the gate."

Randall's hand was on his shoulder. "But we closed that gate, too, in the end."

Milton nodded slowly. "We—or the fate that rules our worlds. But the gate is closed, and God grant, shall never again be opened by any on this world."

"God grant it," the other echoed.

And they were all gazing still toward the thing.
Gazing up toward the crimson spot of light that
burned there among the stars, toward the planet that
shone red, menacing, terrible, but whose menace and
whose terror had been thrust back even as they had
crouched to spring at last upon the earth.

78 The Exile of Time by Ray Cummings

From somewhere out of Time come a swarm of Robots who inflict on New York the awful vengeance of the diabolical cripple Tugh.

Aproximate word count: 55,000

Bigotry:

Warnings:

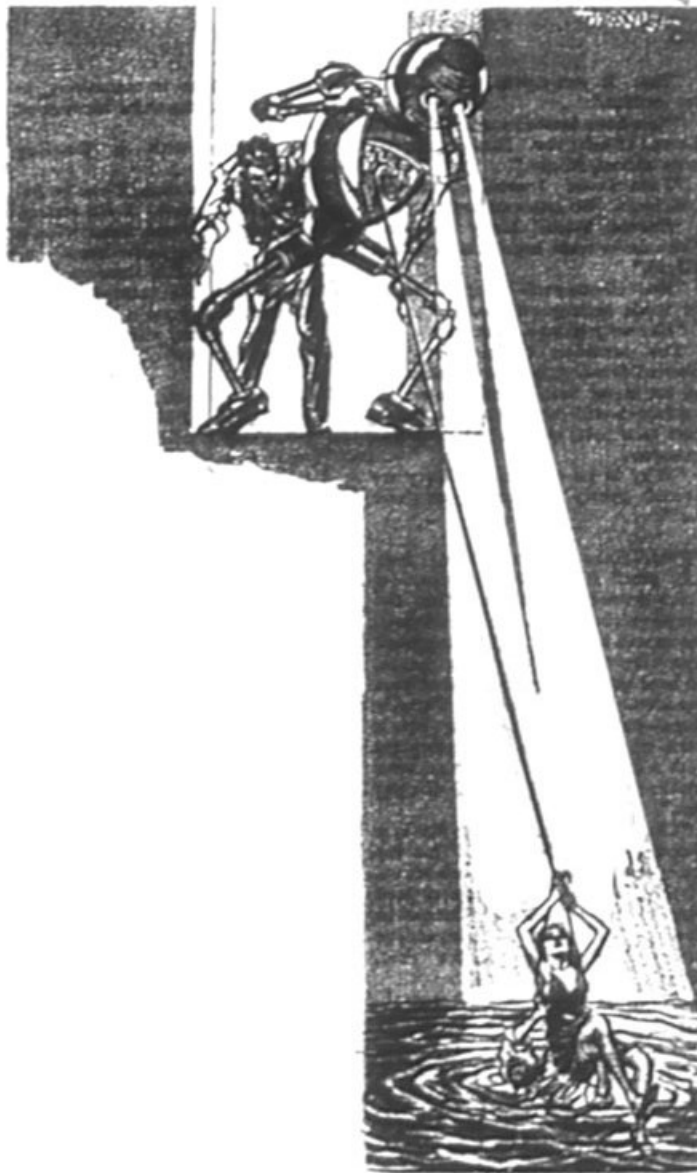
was not one robot



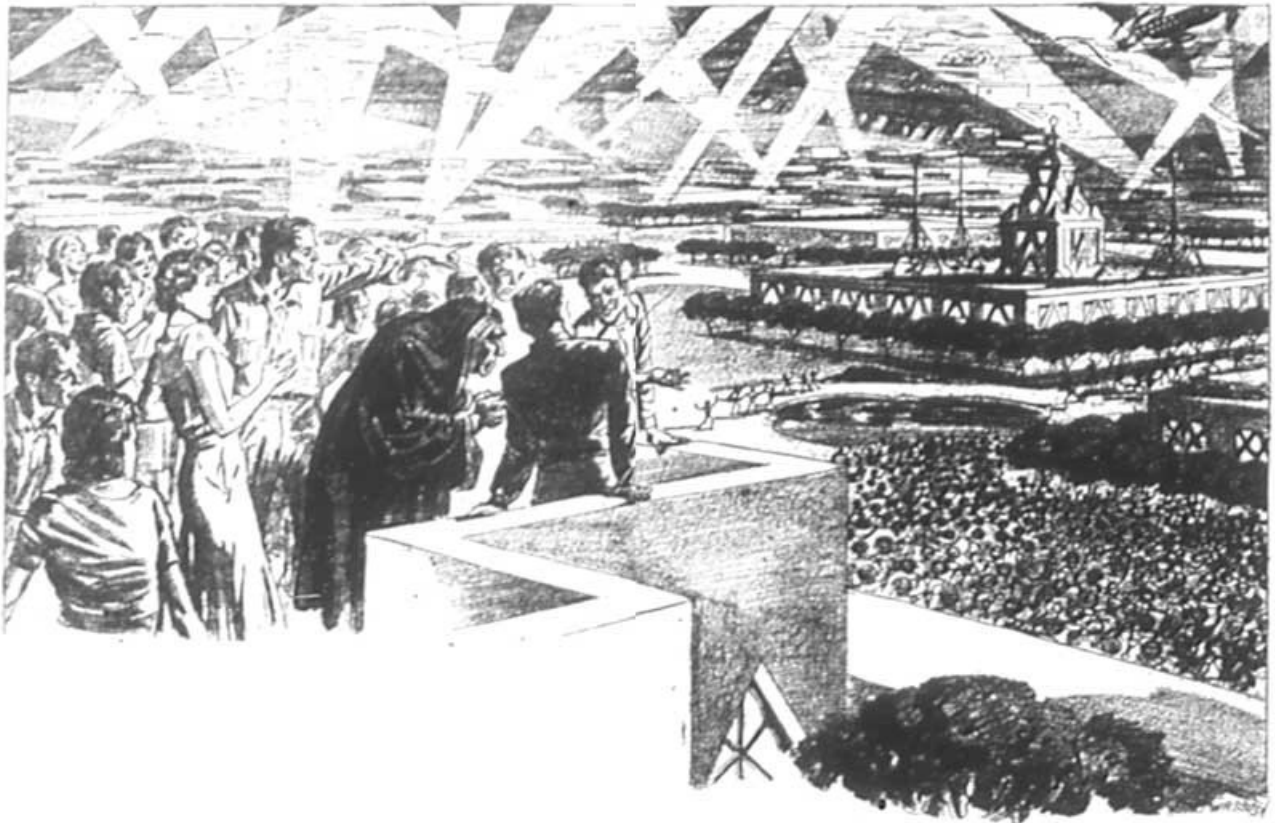
where nothing had stood



the robot braced itself



look exclaimed Larry



- - -

Chapter 1: *Mysterious Girl*

The extraordinary incidents began about 1 A.M. in the night of June 8-9, 1935. I was walking through Patton Place, in New York City, with my friend Larry Gregory. My name is George Rankin. My business—and Larry's—are details quite unimportant to this narrative. We had been friends in college. Both of us were working in New York; and with all our relatives in the middle west we were sharing an apartment on this Patton

Place—a short crooked, little-known street of not particularly impressive residential buildings lying near the section known as Greenwich Village, where towering office buildings of the business districts encroach close upon it.

This night at 1 A. M. it was deserted. A taxi stood at a corner; its chauffeur had left it there, and evidently gone to a nearby lunch room. The street lights were, as always, inadequate. The night was sultry and dark, with a leaden sky and a breathless humidity that presaged a thunder storm. The houses were mostly unlighted at this hour. There was an occasional apartment house among them, but mostly they were low, ramshackle affairs of brick and stone.

We were still three blocks from our apartment when without warning the incidents began which were to plunge us and all the city into disaster. We were upon the threshold of a mystery weird and strange, but we did not know it. Mysterious portals were swinging to engulf us. And all unknowing, we walked into them.

Larry was saying, "Wish we would get a storm to

clear this air—*what the devil?* George, did you hear that?"

We stood listening. There had sounded a choking, muffled scream. We were midway in the block. There was not a pedestrian in sight, nor any vehicle save the abandoned taxi at the corner.

"A woman," he said. "Did it come from this house?"

We were standing before a three-story brick residence. All its windows were dark. There was a front stoop of several steps, and a basement entryway. The windows were all closed, and the place had the look of being unoccupied.

"Not in there, Larry," I answered. "It's closed for the summer—" But I got no further; we heard it again. And this time it sounded, not like a scream, but like a woman's voice calling to attract our attention.

"George! Look there!" Larry cried.

The glow from a street light illumined the basement

entryway, and behind one of the dark windows a girl's face was pressed against the pane.

Larry stood gripping me, then drew me forward and down the steps of the entryway. There was a girl in the front basement room. Darkness was behind her, but we could see her white frightened face close to the glass. She tapped on the pane, and in the silence we heard her muffled voice:

"Let me out! Oh, let me get out!"

The basement door had a locked iron gate. I rattled it. "No way of getting in," I said, then stopped short with surprise. "What the devil—"

I joined Larry by the window. The girl was only a few inches from us. She had a pale, frightened face; wide, terrified eyes. Even with that first glimpse, I was transfixed by her beauty. And startled; there was something weird about her. A low-necked, white satin dress disclosed her snowy shoulders; her head was surmounted by a pile of snow-white hair, with dangling white curls framing her pale ethereal beauty.

She called again.

"What's the matter with you?" Larry demanded. "Are you alone in there? What is it?"

She backed from the window; we could see her only as a white blob in the darkness of the basement room.

I called, "Can you hear us? What is it?"

Then she screamed again. A low scream; but there was infinite terror in it. And again she was at the window.

"You will not hurt me? Let me—oh please let me come out!" Her fists pounded the casement.

What I would have done I don't know. I recall wondering if the policeman would be at our corner down the block; he very seldom was there. I heard Larry saying:

"What the hell!—I'll get her out. George, get me that brick.... Now, get back, girl—I'm going to smash the

window."

But the girl kept her face pressed against the pane. I had never seen such terrified eyes. Terrified at something behind her in the house; and equally frightened at us.

I call to her: "Come to the door. Can't you come to the door and open it?" I pointed to the basement gate. "Open it! Can you hear me?"

"Yes—I can hear you, and you speak my language. But you—you will not hurt me? Where am I? This—this was my house a moment ago. I was living here."

Demented! It flashed to me. An insane girl, locked in this empty house. I gripped Larry; said to him: "Take it easy; there's something queer about this. We can't smash windows. Let's—"

"You open the door," he called to the girl.

"I cannot."

"Why? Is it locked on the inside?"

"I don't know. Because—oh, hurry! If he—if it comes again—!"

We could see her turn to look behind her.

Larry demanded, "Are you alone in there?"

"Yes—now. But, oh! a moment ago he was here!"

"Then come to the door."

"I cannot. I don't know where it is. This is so strange and dark a place. And yet it was my home, just a little time ago."

Demented! And it seemed to me that her accent was very queer. A foreigner, perhaps.

She went suddenly into frantic fear. Her fists beat the window glass almost hard enough to shatter it.

"We'd better get her out," I agreed. "Smash it, Larry."

"Yes." He waved at the girl. "Get back. I'll break the glass. Get away so you won't get hurt."

The girl receded into the dimness.

"Watch your hand," I cautioned. Larry took off his coat and wrapped his hand and the brick in it. I gazed behind us. The street was still empty. The slight commotion we had made had attracted no attention.

The girl cried out again as Larry smashed the pane. "Easy," I called to her. "Take it easy. We won't hurt you."

The splintering glass fell inward, and Larry pounded around the casement until it was all clear. The rectangular opening was fairly large. We could see a dim basement room of dilapidated furniture: a door opening into a back room; the girl; nearby, a white shape watching us.

There seemed no one else. "Come on," I said. "You can get out here."

But she backed away. I was half in the window so I swung my legs over the sill. Larry came after me, and together we advanced on the girl, who shrank before us.

Then suddenly she ran to meet us, and I had the sudden feeling that she was not insane. Her fear of us was overshadowed by her terror at something else in this dark, deserted house. The terror communicated itself to Larry and me. Something eerie, here.

"Come on," Larry muttered. "Let's get her out of here."

I had indeed no desire to investigate anything further. The girl let us help her through the window. I stood in the entryway holding her arms. Her dress was of billowing white satin with a single red rose at the breast; her snowy arms and shoulders were bare; white hair was piled high on her small head. Her face, still terrified, showed parted red lips; a little round black beauty patch adorned one of her powdered cheeks. The thought flashed to me that this was a girl in a fancy dress costume. This was a white wig she

was wearing!

I stood with the girl in the entryway, at a loss what to do. I held her soft warm arms; the perfume of her enveloped me.

"What do you want us to do with you?" I demanded softly. McGuire, the policeman on the block, might at any moment pass. "We might get arrested! What's the matter with you? Can't you explain? Are you hurt?"

She was staring as though I were a ghost, or some strange animal. "Oh, take me away from this place! I will talk—though I do not know what to say—"

Demented or sane, I had no desire to have her fall into the clutches of the police. Nor could we very well take her to our apartment. But there was my friend Dr. Alten, alienist, who lived within a mile of here.

"We'll take her to Alten's," I said to Larry, "and find out what this means. She isn't crazy."

A sudden wild emotion swept me, then. Whatever this

mystery, more than anything in the world I did not want the girl to be insane!

Larry said, "There was a taxi down the street."

It came, now, slowly along the deserted block. The chauffeur had perhaps heard us, and was cruising past to see if we were possible fares. He halted at the curb. The girl had quieted; but when she saw the taxi her face registered wildest terror, and she shrank against me.

"No! No! Don't let it kill me!"

Larry and I were pulling her forward. "What the devil's the matter with you?" Larry demanded again.

She was suddenly wildly fighting with us. "No! That—that mechanism—"

"Get her in it!" Larry panted. "We'll have the neighborhood on us!"

It seemed the only thing to do. We flung her,

scrambling and fighting, into the taxi. To the half-frightened, reluctant driver, Larry said vigorously:

"It's all right; we're just taking her to a doctor. Hurry and get us away from here. There's good money in it for you!"

The promise—and the reassurance of the physician's address—convinced the chauffeur. We whirled off toward Washington Square.

Within the swaying taxi I sat holding the trembling girl. She was sobbing now, but quieting.

"There," I murmured. "We won't hurt you; we're just taking you to a doctor. You can explain to him. He's very intelligent."

"Yes," she said softly. "Yes. Thank you. I'm all right now."

She relaxed against me. So beautiful, so dainty a creature.

Larry leaned toward us. "You're better now?"

"Yes."

"That's fine. You'll be all right. Don't think about it."

He was convinced she was insane. I breathed again the vague hope that it might not be so. She was huddled against me. Her face, upturned to mine, had color in it now; red lips; a faint rose tint in the pale cheeks.

She murmured, "Is this New York?"

My heart sank. "Yes," I answered. "Of course it is."

"But when?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, what year?"

"Why, 1935!"

She caught her breath. "And your name is—"

"George Rankin."

"And I,"—her laugh had a queer break in it—"I am Mistress Mary Atwood. But just a few minutes ago—oh, am I dreaming? Surely I'm not insane!"

Larry again leaned over us. "What are you talking about?"

"You're friendly, you two. Like men; strange, so very strange-looking young men. This—this carriage without any horses—I know now it won't hurt me."

She sat up. "Take me to your doctor. And then to the general of your army. I must see him, and warn him. Warn you all." She was turning half hysterical again. She laughed wildly. "Your general—he won't be General Washington, of course. But I must warn him."

She gripped me. "You think I am demented. But I am not. I am Mary Atwood, daughter of Major Charles Atwood, of General Washington's staff. That was my home, where you broke the window. But it did not look like that a few moments ago. You tell me this is

the year 1935, but just a few moments ago I was living in the year 1777!"

Chapter 2: From Out of the Past

"Sane?" said Dr. Alten. "Of course she's sane." He stood gazing down at Mary Atwood. He was a tall, slim fellow, this famous young alienist, with dark hair turning slightly grey at the temples and a neat black mustache that made him look older than he was. Dr. Alten at this time, in spite of his eminence, had not yet turned forty.

"She's sane," he reiterated. "Though from what you tell me, it's a wonder that she is." He smiled gently at the girl. "If you don't mind, my dear, tell us just what happened to you, as calmly as you can."

She sat by an electrolier in Dr. Alten's living room. The yellow light gleamed on her white satin dress, on her white shoulders, her beautiful face with its little round black beauty patch, and the curls of the white wig dangling to her neck. From beneath the billowing, flounced skirt the two satin points of her slippers showed.

A beauty of the year 1777! This thing so strange! I

gazed at her with quickened pulse. It seemed that I was dreaming; that as I sat before her in my tweed business suit with its tubular trousers I was the anachronism! This should have been candle-light illumining us; I should have been a powdered and bewigged gallant, in gorgeous satin and frilled shirt to match her dress. How strange, how futuristic we three men of 1935 must have looked to her! And this city through which we had whirled her in the throbbing taxi—no wonder she was overwrought.

Alten fumbled in the pockets of his dressing gown for cigarettes. "Go ahead, Miss Mary. You are among friends. I promise we will try and understand."

She smiled. "Yes. I—I believe you." Her voice was low. She sat staring at the floor, choosing her words carefully; and though she stumbled a little, her story was coherent. Upon the wings of her words my fancy conjured that other Time-world, more than a hundred and fifty years ago.

"I was at home to-night," she began. "To-night after dinner. I have no relatives except my father. He is

General Washington's aide. We live—our home is north of the city. I was alone, except for the servants.

"Father sent word to-night that he was coming to see me. The messenger got through the British lines. But the redcoats are everywhere. They were quartered in our house. For months I have been little more than a servant to a dozen of My Lord's Howe's officers. They are gentlemen, though: I have no complaint. Then they left, and father, knowing it, wanted to come to see me.

"He should not have tried it. Our house is watched. He promised me he would not wear the British red." She shuddered. "Anything but that—to have him executed as a spy. He would not risk that, but wear merely a long black cloak.

"He was to come about ten o'clock. But at midnight there was no sign of him. The servants were asleep. I sat alone, and every pounding hoof-beat on the road matched my heart.

"Then I went into the garden. There was a dim moon

in and out of the clouds. It was hot, like to-night. I mean, why it *was* to-night. It's so strange—"

In the silence of Alten's living room we could hear the hurried ticking of his little mantle clock, and from the street outside came the roar of a passing elevated train and the honk of a taxi. This was New York of 1935. But to me the crowding ghosts of the past were here. In fancy I saw the white pillars of the moonlit Atwood home. A garden with a dirt road beside it. Red-coated British soldiers passing.... And to the south the little city of New York extending northward from crooked Maiden Lane and the Bowling Green....

"Go on, Mistress Mary."

"I sat on a bench in the garden. And suddenly before me there was a white ghost. A shape. A wraith of something which a moment before had not been there. I sat too frightened to move. I could not call out. I tried to, but the sound would not come.

"The shape was like a mist, a little ball of cloud in the center of the garden lawn. Then in a second or two it

was solid—a thing like a shining cage, with crisscrossing white bars. It was like a room; a metal cage like a room. I thought that the thing was a phantom or that I was asleep and dreaming. But it was real."

Alten interrupted. "How big was it?"

"As large as this room; perhaps larger. But it was square, and about twice as high as a man."

A cage, then, some twenty feet square and twelve feet high.

She went on: "The cage door opened. I think I was standing, then, and I tried to run but could not. The—the *thing* came from the door of the cage and walked toward me. It was about ten feet tall. It looked—oh, it looked like a man!"

She buried her face in her hands. Again the room was silent. Larry was seated, staring at her; all of us were breathless.

"Like a man?" Alten prompted gently.

"Yes; like a man." She raised her white face. This girl out of the past! Admiration for her swept me anew—she was bravely trying to smile.

"Like a man. A thing with legs, a body, a great round head and swaying arms. A jointed man of metal! You surely must know all about them."

"A Robot!" Larry muttered.

"You have them here, I suppose. Like that rumbling carriage without horses, this jointed iron man came walking toward me. And it spoke! A most horrible hollow voice—but it seemed almost human. And what it said I do not know, for I fainted. I remember falling as it came walking toward me, with stiff-jointed legs.

"When I came to my senses I was in the cage. Everything was humming and glowing. There was a glow outside the bars like a moonlit mist. The iron monster was sitting at a table, with peculiar things—mechanical things—"

"The controls of the cage-mechanisms," said Alten.
"How long were you in the cage?"

"I don't know. Time seemed to stop. Everything was silent except the humming noises. They were everywhere. I guess I was only half conscious. The monster sat motionless. In front of him were big round clock faces with whirling hands. Oh, I suppose you don't find this strange; but to me—!"

"Could you see anything outside the cage?" Alten persisted. "No. Just a fog. But it was crawling and shifting. Yes!—I remember now—I could not see anything out there, but I had the thought, the feeling, that there were tremendous things to see! The monster spoke again and told me to be careful; that we were going to stop. Its iron hands pulled at levers. Then the humming grew fainter; died away; and I felt a shock.

"I thought I had fainted again. I could just remember being pulled through the cage door. The monster left me on the ground. It said, 'Lie there, for I will return very soon.'

"The cage vanished. I saw a great cliff of stone near me; it had yellow-lighted openings, high up in the air. And big stone fences hemmed me in. Then I realized I was in an open space between a lot of stone houses. One towered like a cliff, or the side of a pyramid—"

"The back yard of that house on Patton Place!" Larry exclaimed. He looked at me. "Has it any back yard, George?"

"How should I know?" I retorted. "Probably has."

"Go on," Alten was prompting.

"That is nearly all. I found a doorway leading to a dark room. I crawled through it toward a glow of light. I passed through another room. I thought I was in a nightmare, and that this was my home. I remembered that the cage had not moved. It had hardly lurched. Just trembled; vibrated.

"But this was not my home. The rooms were small and dark. Then I peered through a window on a strange stone street. And saw these strange-looking young

men. And that is all—all I can tell you."

She had evidently held herself calm by a desperate effort. She broke down now, sobbing without restraint.

Chapter 3: Tugh, the Cripple

The portals of this mystery had swung wide to receive us. The tumbling events which menaced all our world of 1935 were upon us now. A maelstrom. A torrent in the midst of which we were caught up like tiny bits of cork and whirled away.

But we thought we understood the mystery. We believed we were acting for the best. What we did was no doubt ill-considered; but the human mind is so far from omniscient! And this thing was so strange!

Alten said, "You have a right to be overwrought, Mistress Mary Atwood. But this thing is as strange to us as it is to you. I called that iron monster a Robot. But it does not belong to our age: if it does I have never seen one such as you describe. And traveling through Time—"

He smiled down at her. "That is not a commonplace everyday occurrence to us, I assure you. The difference is that in this world of ours we can understand—or at least explain—these things as

being scientific. And so they have not the terror of the supernatural."

Mary was calmer now. She returned his smile. "I realize that; or at least I am trying to realize it."

What a level-headed girl was this! I touched her arm. "You are very wonderful—"

Alten brushed me away. "Let's try and reduce it to rationality. The cage was—is, I should say, since of course it still exists—that cage is a Time-traveling vehicle. It is traveling back and forth through Time, operated by a Robot. Call it that. A pseudo-human monster fashioned of metal in the guise of a man."

Even Alten had to force himself to speak calmly, as he gazed from one to the other of us. "It came, no doubt from some future age, where half-human mechanisms are common, and Time-traveling is known. That cage probably does not travel in Space, but only in Time. In the future—somewhere—the Space of that house on Patton Place may be the laboratory of a famous scientist. And in the past—in the year 1777—that

same Space was the garden of Mistress Atwood's home. So much is obvious. But why—"

"Why," Larry burst out, "did that iron monster stop in 1777 and abduct this girl?"

"And why," I intercepted, "did it stop here in 1935?" I gazed at Mary. "And it told you it would return?"

"Yes."

Alten was pondering. "There must be some connection, of course.... Mistress Mary, had you never seen this cage before?"

"No."

"Nor anything like it? Was anything like that known to your Time?"

"No. Oh, I cannot truly say that. Some people believe in phantoms, omens and witchcraft. There was in Salem, in the Massachusetts Colony, not so many years ago—"

"I don't mean that. I mean Time-traveling."

"There were soothsayers and fortune-tellers, and necromancers with crystals to gaze into the future."

"We still have them," Alten smiled. "You see, we don't know much more than you do about this thing."

I said, "Did you have any enemy? Anyone who wished you harm?"

She thought a moment. "No—yes, there was one." She shuddered at the memory. "A man—a cripple—a horribly repulsive man of about one score and ten years. He lives down near the Battery." She paused.

"Tell us about him," Larry urged.

She nodded. "But what could he have to do with this? He is horribly deformed. Thin, bent legs, a body like a cask and a bulging forehead with goggling eyes. My Lord Howe's officers say he is very intelligent and very learned. Loyal to the King, too. There was a munitions plot in the Bermudas, and this cripple and

Lord Howe were concerned in it. But Father likes the fellow and says that in reality he wishes our cause well. He is rich.

"But you don't want to hear all this. He—he made love to me, and I repulsed him. There was a scene with Father, and Father had our lackeys throw him out. That was a year ago. He cursed horribly. He vowed then that some day he—he would have me; and get revenge on Father. But he has kept away. I have not seen him for a twelvemonth."

We were silent. I chanced to glance at Alten, and a strange look was on his face.

He said abruptly, "What is this cripple's name, Mistress Mary?"

"Tugh. He is known to all the city as Tugh. Just that. I never heard any Christian name."

Alten rose sharply to his feet. "A cripple named Tugh?"

"Yes," she affirmed wonderingly. "Does it mean anything to you?"

Alten swung on me. "What is the number of that house on Patton Place? Did you happen to notice?"

I had, and wondering I told him.

"Just a minute," he said. "I want to use the phone."

He came back to us in a moment: his face was very solemn. "That house on Patton Place is owned by a man named Tugh! I just called a reporter friend; he remembers a certain case: he confirmed what I thought. Mistress Mary, did this Tugh in your Time ever consult doctors, trying to have his crippled body made whole?"

"Why, of course he did. I have heard that many times. But his crippled, deformed body cannot be cured."

Alten checked Larry and me when we would have broken in with astonished questions. He said:

"Don't ask me what it means; I don't know. But I think that this cripple—this Tugh—has lived both in 1777 and 1935, and is traveling between them in this Time-traveling cage. And perhaps he is the human master of that Robot."

Alten made a vehement gesture. "But we'd better not theorize; it's too fantastic. Here is the story of Tugh in our Time. He came to me some three years ago; in 1932, I think. He offered any price if I could cure his crippled body. All the New York medical fraternity knew him. He seemed sane, but obsessed with the idea that he must have a body like other men. Like Faust, who, as an old man, paid the price of his soul to become youthful, he wanted to have the beautiful body of a young man."

Alten was speaking vehemently. My thoughts ran ahead of his words; I could imagine with grewsome fancy so many things. A cripple, traveling to different ages seeking to be cured. Desiring a different body....

Alten was saying, "This fellow Tugh lived alone in that house on Patton Place. He was all you say of him,

Mistress Mary. Hideously repulsive. A sinister personality. About thirty years old.

"And, in 1932, he got mixed up with a girl who had a somewhat dubious reputation herself. A dancer, a frequenter of night-clubs, as they used to be called. Her name was Doris Johns—something like that. She evidently thought she could get money out of Tugh. Whatever it was, there was a big uproar. The girl had him arrested, saying that he had assaulted her. The police had quite a time with the cripple."

Larry and I remembered a few of the details of it now, though neither of us had been in New York at the time.

Alten went on: "Tugh fought with the police. Went berserk. I imagine they handled him pretty roughly. In the Magistrate's Court he made another scene, and fought with the court attendants. With ungovernable rage he screamed vituperatives, and was carried kicking, biting and snarling from the court-room. He threatened some wild weird revenge upon all the city officials—even upon the city itself."

"Nice sort of chap," Larry commented.

But Alten did not smile. "The Magistrate could only hold him for contempt of Court. The girl had absolutely no evidence to support her accusation of assault. Tugh was finally dismissed. A week later he murdered the girl.

"The details are unimportant; but he did it. The police had him trapped in his house; had the house surrounded—this same one on Patton Place—but when they burst in to take him, he had inexplicably vanished. He was never heard from again."

Alten continued to regard us with grim, solemn face. "Never heard from—until to-night. And now we hear of him. How he vanished, with the police guarding every exit to that house—well, it's obvious, isn't it? He went into another Time-world. Back to 1777, doubtless."

Mary Atwood gave a little cry. "I had forgotten that I must warn you. Tugh told me once, before Father and I quarreled with him, that he had a mysterious power.

He was a most wonderful man, he said. And there was a world in the future—he mentioned 1934 or 1935—which he hated. A great city whose people had wronged him; and he was going to bring death to them. Death to them all! I did not heed him. I thought he was demented, raving...."

Alten's little clock ticked with tumultuous heartbeat through another silence. The great city around us, even though this was two o'clock in the morning, throbbed with a myriad of blended sounds.

A warning! Was the girl from out of the past giving us a warning of coming disaster to this great city?

Alten was pacing the floor. "What are we to do—tell the authorities? Take Mistress Mary Atwood to Police Headquarters and inform them that she has come from the year 1777? And that, if we are not careful, there will be an attack upon New York?"

"No!" I burst out. I could fancy how we would be received at Police Headquarters if we did that! And our pictures in to-morrow's newspapers. Mary's

picture, with a jibing headline ridiculing us.

"No," echoed Alten. "I have no intention of doing it. I'm not so foolish as that." He stopped before Mary. "What do you want to do? You're obviously an exceptionally intelligent, level-headed girl. Heaven knows you need to be."

"I—I want to get back home," she stammered.

A pang shot through me as she said it. A hundred and fifty years to separate us. A vast gulf. An impassible barrier.

"That mechanism said it would return!"

"Exactly," agreed Alten. An excitement was upon us all. "Exactly what I mean! Shall we chance it? Try it? There's nothing else I can think of to do. I have a revolver and two hunting rifles."

"Just what do you mean?" I demanded.

"I mean, we'll take my car and go to Tugh's house on

Patton Place. Right now! And if that mechanical monster returns, we'll seize it!"

Alten, the usually calm, precise man of science, was tensely vehement. "Seize it! Why not? Three of us, armed, ought to be able to overcome a Robot! Then we'll seize the Time-traveling cage. Perhaps we can operate it. If not, with it in our possession we'll at least have something to show the authorities; there'll be no ridicule then!"

Our inescapable destiny was making us plunge so rashly into this mystery! With the excitement and the strange fantasy of it upon us, we thought we were acting for the best.

Within a quarter of an hour, armed and with a long overcoat and a scarf to hide Mary Atwood's beauty, we took Alten's car and drove to Patton Place.

Chapter 4: The Fight With the Robot

Patrolman McGuire quite evidently had not passed through Patton Place since we left it; or at least he had not noticed the broken window. The house appeared as before, dark, silent, deserted, and the broken basement window yawned with its wide black opening.

"I'll leave the car around on the other street," Alten said as slowly we passed the house. "Quick—no one's in sight; you three get out here."

We crouched in the dim entryway and in a moment he joined us.

I clung to Mary Atwood's arm. "You're not afraid?" I asked.

"No. Yes; of course I am afraid. But I want to do what we planned. I want to go back to my own world, to my Father."

"Inside!" Alten whispered. "I'll go first. You two follow

with her."

I can say now that we should not have taken her into that house. It is so easy to look back upon what one might have done!

We climbed through the window, into the dark front basement room. There was only silence, and our faintly padding footsteps on the carpeted floor. The furniture was shrouded with cotton covers standing like ghosts in the gloom. I clutched the loaded rifle which Alten had given me. Larry was similarly armed; and Alten carried a revolver.

"Which way, Mary?" I whispered. "You're sure it was outdoors?"

"Yes. This way, I think."

We passed through the connecting door. The back room seemed to be a dismantled kitchen.

"You stay with her here, a moment," Alten whispered to me. "Come on, Larry. Let's make sure no one—

nothing—is down here."

I stood silent with Mary, while they prowled about the lower floor.

"It may have come and gone," I whispered.

"Yes." She was trembling against me.

It seemed to me an eternity while we stood there listening to the faint footfalls of Larry and Alten. Once they must have stood quiet; then the silence leaped and crowded us. It is horrible to listen to a pregnant silence which every moment might be split by some weird unearthly sound.

Larry and Alten returned. "Seems to be all clear," Alten whispered. "Let's go into the back yard."

The little yard was dim. The big apartment house against its rear wall loomed with a blank brick face, save that there were windows some eight stories up. Only a few windows overlooked this dim area with its high enclosing walls. The space was some forty feet

square, and there was a faded grass plot in the center.

We crouched near the kitchen door, with Mary behind us in the room. She said she could recall the cage having stood near the center of the yard, with its door facing this way....

Nearly an hour passed. It seemed that the dawn must be near, but it was only around four o'clock. The same storm clouds hung overhead—a threatening storm which would not break. The heat was oppressing.

"It's come and gone," Larry whispered; "or it isn't coming. I guess that this—"

And then it came! We were just outside the doorway, crouching against the shadowed wall of the house. I had Mary close behind me, my rifle ready.

"There!" whispered Alten.

We all saw it—a faint luminous mist out near the center of the yard—a crawling, shifting ball of fog.

Alten and Larry, one on each side of me, shifted sidewise, away from me. Mary stood and cast off her dark overcoat. We men were in dark clothes, but she stood in gleaming white against the dark rectangle of doorway. It was as we had arranged. A moment only, she stood there; then she moved back, further behind me in the black kitchen.

And in that moment the cage had materialized. We were hoping its occupant had seen the girl, and not us. A breathless moment passed while we stared for the first time at this strange thing from the Unknown.... A formless, glowing mist, it quickly gathered itself into solidity. It seemed to shrink. It took form. From a wraith of a cage, in a second it was solid. And so silently, so swiftly, came this thing out of Time into what we call the Present! The dim yard a second ago had been empty.

The cage stood there, a thing of gleaming silver bars. It seemed to enclose a single room. From within its dim interior came a faint glow, which outlined something standing at the bars, peering out.

The doorway was facing us. There had been utter silence; but suddenly, as though to prove how solid was this apparition, we heard the clank of metal, and the door slid open.

I turned to make sure that Mary was hiding well behind me. The way back to the street, if need for escape arose, was open to her.

I turned again, to face the shining cage. In the doorway something stood peering out, a light behind it. It was a great jointed thing of dark metal some ten feet high. For a moment it stood motionless. I could not see its face clearly, though I knew there was a suggestion of human features, and two great round glowing spots of eyes.

It stepped forward—toward us. A jointed, stiff-legged step. Its arms were dangling loosely; I heard one of its mailed hands clank against its sides.

"Now!" Alten whispered.

I saw Alten's revolver leveling, and my own rifle went

up.

"Aim at its face," I murmured.

We pulled our triggers together, and two spurts of flame spat before us. But the thing had stooped an instant before, and we missed. Then came Larry's shot. And then chaos.

I recall hearing the ping of Larry's bullet against the mailed body of the Robot. At that it crouched, and from it leaped a dull red-black beam of light. I heard Mary scream. She had not fled but was clinging to me. I cast her off.

"Run! Get back! Get away!" I cried.

Larry shouted, as we all stood bathed in the dull light from the Robot:

"Look out! It sees us!"

He fired again, into the light—and murmured, "Why—why—"

A great surprise and terror was in his tone. Beside me, with half-leveled revolver, Alten stood transfixed. And he too was muttering something.

All this happened in an instant. And there I was aware that I was trying to get my rifle up for firing again; but I could not. My arms stiffened. I tried to take a step, tried to move a foot, but could not. I was rooted there; held, as though by some giant magnet, to the ground!

This horrible dull-red light! It was cold—a frigid, paralyzing blast. The blood ran like cold water in my veins. My feet were heavy with the weight of my body pressing them down.

Then the Robot was moving; coming forward; holding the light upon us. I thought I heard its voice—and a horrible, hollow, rasping laugh.

My brain was chilling. I had confused thoughts; impressions, vague and dreamlike. As though in a dream I felt myself standing there with Mary clinging to me. Both of us were frozen inert upon our feet.

I tried to shout, but my tongue was too thick; my throat seemed swelling inside. I heard Alten's revolver clatter to the stone pavement of the yard. And saw him fall forward—out.

I felt that in another instant I too would fall. This damnable, chilling light! Then the beam turned partly away, and fell more fully upon Larry. With his youth and greater strength than Alten's or mine, he had resisted its first blast. His weapon had fallen; now he stooped and tried to seize it; but he lost his balance and staggered backward against the house wall.

And then the Robot was upon him. It sprang—this mechanism!—this machine in human form! And, with whatever pseudo-human intelligence actuated its giant metal body, it reached under Larry for his rifle! Its great mailed hand swept the ground, seized the rifle and flung it away. And as Larry twisted sidewise, the Robot's arm with a sweep caught him and rolled him across the yard. When he stopped, he lay motionless.

I heard myself thickly calling to Mary, and the light

flashed again upon us. And then we fell forward.
Clinging together, we fell....

I did not quite lose consciousness. It seemed that I was frozen, and drifting off half into a nightmare sleep. Great metal arms were gathering Mary and me from the ground. Lifting us; carrying us....

We were in the cage. I felt myself lying on the grid of a metal floor. I could vaguely see the crossed bars of the ceiling overhead, and the latticed walls around me....

Then the dull-red light was gone. The chill was gone. I was warming. The blessed warm blood again was coursing through my veins, reviving me, bringing back my strength.

I turned over, and found Mary lying beside me. I heard her softly murmur:

"George! George Rankin!"

The giant mechanism clanked the door closed, and

came with stiff, stilted steps back into the center of the cage. I heard the hollow rumble of its voice, chuckling, as its hand pulled a switch.

At once the cage-room seemed to reel. It was not a physical movement, though, but more a reeling of my senses, a wild shock to all my being.

Then, after a nameless interval, I steadied. Around me was a humming, glowing intensity of tiny sounds and infinitely small, infinitely rapid vibrations. The whole room grew luminous. The Robot, seated now at a table, showed for a moment as thin as an apparition. All this room—Mary lying beside me, the mechanism, myself—all this was imponderable, intangible, unreal.

And outside the bars stretched a shining mist of movement. Blurred shifting shapes over a vast illimitable vista. Changing things; melting landscapes. Silent, tumbling, crowding events blurred by our movement as we swept past them.

We were traveling through Time!

Chapter 5: The Girl from 2930

I must take up now the sequence of events as Larry saw them. I was separated from Larry during most of the strange incidents which befell us later; but from his subsequent account of what happened to him I am constructing several portions of this history, using my own words based upon Larry's description of the events in which I personally did not participate; I think that this method avoids complications in the narrative and makes more clear my own and Larry's simultaneous actions.

Larry recovered consciousness in the back yard of the house on Patton Place probably only a moment or two after Mary and I had been snatched away in the Time-traveling cage. He found himself bruised and battered, but apparently without injuries. He got to his feet, weak and shaken. His head was roaring.

He recalled what had happened to him, but it seemed like a dream. The back yard was then empty. He remembered vaguely that he had seen the mechanism carry Mary and me into the cage, and that the cage

had vanished.

Larry knew that only a few moments had passed. The shots had aroused the neighborhood. As he stood now against the house wall, dizzily looking around, he was aware of calling voices from the nearby windows.

Then Larry stumbled over Alten, who was lying on his face near the kitchen doorway. Still alive, he groaned as Larry fell over him; but he was unconscious.

Forgetting all about his weapon, Larry's first thought was to rush out for help. He staggered through the dark kitchen into the front room, and through the corridor into the street.

Patton Place, as before, was deserted. The houses were dark; the alarm was all in the rear. There were no pedestrians, no vehicles, and no sign of a policeman. Dawn was just coming; as Larry turned eastward he saw, in a patch of clearing sky, stars paling with the coming daylight.

With uncertain steps, out in the middle of the street,

Larry ran eastward through the middle of the street, hoping that at the next corner he might encounter someone, or find a telephone over which he might call the police.

But he had not gone more than five hundred feet when suddenly he stopped; stood there wavering, panting, staring with whirling senses. Near the middle of the street, with the faint dawn behind it, a ball of gathering mist had appeared directly in his path. It was a luminous, shining mist—and it was gathering into form!

In seconds a small, glowing cage of white luminous bars stood there in the street, where there had just been nothing! It was not the Time-traveling cage from the house yard he had just left. No—he knew it was not that one. This one was similar, but much smaller.

The shock of its appearance held Larry for a moment transfixed. It had so silently, so suddenly appeared in his path that Larry was now within a foot or two of its doorway.

The doorway slid open, and a man leaped out. Behind him, a girl peered from the doorway. Larry stood gaping, wholly confused. The cage had materialized so abruptly that the leaping man collided with him before either man could avoid the other. Larry gripped the man before him; struck out with his fists and shouted. The girl in the doorway called frantically:

"Harl-no noise! Harl-stop him!"

Then, suddenly the two of them were upon Larry and pulling him toward the doorway of the cage. Inside, he was jerked; he shouted wildly; but the girl slammed the door. Then in a soft, girlish voice, in English with a curiously indescribable accent and intonation, the girl said hastily:

"Hold him, Harl! Hold him! I'll start the traveler!"

The black garbed figure of a slim young man was gripping Larry as the girl pulled a switch and there was a shock, a reeling of Larry's senses, as the cage, motionless in Space, sped off into Time....

It seems needless to encumber this narrative with prolonged details of how Larry explained himself to his two captors. Or how they told him who they were; and from whence they had come; and why. To Larry it was a fantastic—and confusing at first—series of questions and answers. An hour? The words have no meaning. They were traveling through Time. Years were minutes—the words meaning nothing save how they impressed the vehicle's human occupants. To them all it was an interval of mutual distrust which was gradually changing into friendship. Larry found the two strangers singularly direct; singularly forceful in quiet, calm fashion; singularly keen of perception. They had not meant to capture him. The encounter had startled them, and Larry's shouts would have brought others upon the scene.

Almost at once they knew Larry was no enemy, and told him so. And in a moment Larry was pouring out all that had happened to him; and to Alten and Mary Atwood and me. This strange thing! But to Larry now, telling it to these strange new companions, it abruptly seemed not fantastic, but only sinister. The Robot, an enemy, had captured Mary Atwood and me, and

whirled us off in the other—the larger—cage.

And in this smaller cage Larry was with friends—for he suddenly found their purpose the same as his! They were chasing this other Time-traveler, with its semi-human, mechanical operator!

The young man said, "You explain to him, Tina. I will watch."

He was a slim, pale fellow, handsome in a queer, tight-lipped, stern-faced fashion. His close-fitting black silk jacket had a white neck ruching and white cuffs; he wore a wide white-silk belt, snug black-silk knee-length trousers and black stockings.

And the girl was similarly dressed. Her black hair was braided and coiled upon her head, and ornaments dangled from her ears. Over her black blouse was a brocaded network jacket; her white belt, compressing her slim waist, dangled with tassels; and there were other tassels on the garters at the knees of her trousers.

She was a pale-faced, beautiful girl, with black brows arching in a thin line, with purple-black eyes like somber pools. She was no more than five feet tall, and slim and frail. But, like her companion, there was about her a queer aspect of calm, quiet power and force of personality—physical vitality merged with an intellect keenly sharp.

She sat with Larry on a little metal bench, listening, almost without interruption, to his explanation. And then, succinctly she gave her own. The young man, Harl, sat at his instruments, with his gaze searching for the other cage, five hundred feet away in Space, but in Time unknown.

And outside the shining bars Larry could vaguely see the blurred, shifting, melting vistas of New York City hastening through the changes Time had brought to it.

This young man, Harl, and this girl, Tina, lived in New York City in the Time-world of 2930 A. D. To Larry it was a thousand years in the future. Tina was the Princess of the American Nation. It was an hereditary

title, non-political, added several hundred years previously as a picturesque symbol. A tradition; something to make less prosaic the political machine of Republican government. Tina was loved by her people, we afterward came to learn.

Harl was an aristocrat of the New York City of Tina's Time-world, a scientist. In the Government laboratories, under the same roof where Tina dwelt, Harl had worked with another, older scientist, and—so Tina told me—together they had discovered the secret of Time-traveling. They had built two cages, a large and a small, which could travel freely through Time.

The smaller vehicle—this one in which Larry now was speeding—was, in the Time-world of 2930, located in the garden of Tina's palace. The other, somewhat larger, they had built some five hundred feet distant, just beyond the palace walls, within a great Government laboratory.

Harl's fellow scientist—the leader in their endeavors, since he was much older and of wider experience—

was not altogether trusted by Tina. He took the credit for the discovery of Time-traveling; yet, said Tina, it was Harl's genius which in reality had worked out the final problems.

And this older scientist was a cripple. A hideously repulsive fellow, named Tugh!

"Tugh!" exclaimed Larry.

"The same," said Tina in her crisp fashion. "Yes—undoubtedly the same. So you see why what you have told us was of such interest. Tugh is a Government leader in our world; and now we find he has lived in *your* Time, and in the Time of this Mary Atwood."

From his seat at the instrument table, Harl burst out: "So he murdered a girl of 1935, and has abducted another of 1777? You would not have me judge him, Tina—"

"No one," she said, "may judge without full facts. This man here—this Larry of 1935—tells us that only a mechanism is in the larger cage—which is what we

thought, Harl. And this mechanism, without a doubt, is the treacherous Migul."

There was, in 2930, a vast world of machinery. The god of the machine had developed them to almost human intricacy. Almost all the work of the world, particularly in America, and most particularly in the mechanical center of New York City, was done by machinery. And the machinery itself was guided, handled, operated—even, in some instances, constructed—by other, more intricate machines. They were fashioned in pseudo-human form—thinking, logically acting, independently acting mechanisms: the Robots. All but human, they were—a new race. Inferior to humans, yet similar.

And in 2930 the machines, slaves of idle human masters, had been developed too highly! They were upon the verge of a revolt!

All this Tina briefly sketched now to Larry. And to Larry it seemed a very distant, very academic danger. Yet so soon all of us were plunged into the midst of it!

The revolt had not yet come, but it was feared. A great Robot named Migul seemed fomenting it. The revolt was smouldering; at any moment it would burst; and then the machines would rise to destroy the humans.

This was the situation when Harl and Tugh completed the Time-traveling vehicles in this world. They had been tested, but never used. Then Tugh had vanished; was gone now; and the larger of the two vehicles was also gone.

Both Harl and Tina had always distrusted Tugh. They thought him allied to the Robots. But they had no proof; and suavely he denied it, and helped always with the Government activities struggling to keep the mechanical slaves docile and at work.

Tugh and the larger vehicle had vanished, and so had Migul, the insubordinate, giant mechanism—at which, unknown to the Government officials, Tina and Harl had taken the other cage and started in pursuit. It was possible that Tugh was loyal; that Migul had abducted him and stolen the cage.

"Wait!" exclaimed Larry. "I'm trying to figure this out. It seems to hang together. It almost does, but not quite. When did Tugh vanish from your world?"

"To our consciousness," Tina answered, "about three hours ago. Perhaps a little longer than that."

"But look here," Larry protested: "according to my story and that of Mary Atwood, Tugh lived in 1935 and in 1777 for three years."

Confusing? But in a moment Larry understood it. Tugh could have taken the cage, gone to 1777 and to 1935, alternated between them for what was to him, and to those Time-worlds, three years—then have returned to 2930 *on the same day of his departure*. He would have lived these three years; grown that much older; but to the Time-world of 2930 neither he nor the cage would have been missed.

"That," said Tina, "is what doubtless he did. The cage is traveling again. But you, Larry, tell us only Migul is in it."

"I couldn't say that of my own knowledge," said Larry. "Mary Atwood said so. It held only the mechanism you call Migul. And now Migul has with him Mary and my friend George Rankin. We must reach them."

"We want that quite as much as you do," said Harl. "And to find Tugh. If he is a friend we must save him; if a traitor—punish him."

Larry began, "But can you get to the other cage?"

"Only if it stops," said Tina. "*When* it stops, I should say."

"Come here," said Harl. "I will show you."

Larry crossed the glowing room. He had forgotten its aspect—the ghostly unreality around him. He too—his body, like Harl's and Tina's—was of the same wraith-like substance.... Then, suddenly, Larry's viewpoint shifted. The room and its occupants were real and tangible. And outside the glowing bars—everything out there was the unreality.

"Here," said Harl. "I will show you. It is not visible yet."

Each of the cages was equipped with an intricate device, strange of name, which Larry and I have since termed a Time-telespectroscope. Larry saw it now as a small metal box, with tuning vibration dials, batteries, coils, a series of tiny prisms and an image-mirror—the whole surmounted by what appeared the barrel of a small telescope. Harl had it leveled and was gazing through it.

The workings of the Time-telespectroscope involve all the intricate postulates and mathematical formulae of Time-traveling itself. As a matter of practicality, however, the results obtained are simple of understanding. The etheric vibratory rate of the vehicles while traveling through Time was constantly changing. Through the telespectroscope one cage was visible to the other across the five hundred feet of intervening Space when they approached a simultaneous Time; when they, so to speak, were tuned in unison.

Thus, Harl explained, the other cage would show as a ghost, the faintest of wraiths, over a Time-distance of some five or ten years. And the closer in Time they approached it, the more solid it would appear.

The enemy cage was not visible, now. But Harl and Tina had glimpsed it on several occasions. What vast realms Time opens within a single small segment of Space! The larger vehicle seemed speeding back and forth. A dash into the year 1777! as Larry learned from Mary Atwood.

And there had been several evidences of the cage halting in 1935. Larry's account explained two such pauses. But the others? Those others, which brought to the City of New York such amazing disaster? We did not learn of them until much later. But Alten lived through them, and presently I shall reconstruct them from his account.

The larger cage was difficult to trace in its sweep along the corridors of Time. Never once had Tina and Harl been able to stop simultaneously with it, for a year has so many separate days and hours. The

nearest they came was the halt in the night of June 8-9, when they encountered Larry, and, startled, seized him and moved on again.

Harl continued to gaze through the eyepiece of the detecting instrument. But nothing showed, and the mirror-grid on the table was dark.

"But—which way are we going?" Larry stammered.

"Back," said Tina. "The retrograde.... Wait! Do not do that!"

Larry had turned toward where the bars, less luminous, showed a dark rectangle like a window. The desire swept him to gaze out at the shining, changing scene.

But Tina checked him. "Do not do that! Not yet! It is too great a shock in the retrograde. It was to me."

"But where are we?"

In answer she gestured toward a series of tiny dials

on the table edge. There were at least two score of them, laid in a triple bank. Dials to record the passing minutes, hours, days; the years, the centuries! Larry stared at the small whirring pointers. Some were a blur of swift whirling movement—the hours and days. Tina showed Larry how to read them. The cage was passing through the year 1880. In a few moments of Larry's consciousness it was 1799. Then 1793. The infant American nation was here now. But with the cage retrograding, soon they would be in the Revolutionary War.

Tina said. "The other cage may go back to 1777, if Tugh meant ill to Mary Atwood, or wants revenge upon her father, at you said. We shall see."

They had reached 1790 when Harl gave a low ejaculation.

"You see it?" Tina murmured.

"Yes. Very faintly."

Larry bent tensely forward. "Will it show on the

mirror?"

"Yes; presently. We are about ten years from it. If we get closer, the mirror will show it."

But the mirror held dark. No—now it was glowing a trifle. A vague luminosity.

Tina moved toward the instrument controls nearby. "Watch closely, Harl. I will slow us down."

It seemed to Larry that the humming with which everything around him was endowed, now began descending in pitch. And his head suddenly was unsteady. A singular, wild, queer feeling was within him. An unrest. A tugging torment of every tiny cell of his body.

Tina said. "Hold steady, Larry, for when we stop."

"Will it shock me?"

"Yes—at first. But the shock will not harm you: it is nearly all mental."

The mirror held an image now—the other cage. Larry saw, on the six-inch square mirror surface, a crawling, melting scene of movement. And in the midst of it, the image of the other cage, faint and spectral. In all the mirrored movement, only the apparition of the cage was still. And this marked it; made it visible.

Over an interval, while Larry stared, the ghostly image grew plainer. They were approaching its Time-factor!

"It is stopping," Harl murmured. Larry was aware that he had left the eyepiece and joined Tina at the controls.

"Tina, let us try to get it right this time."

"Yes."

"In 1777; but which month, would you say?"

"It has stopped! See?"

Larry heard them clicking switches, and setting the

controls for a stop. Then he felt Tina gently push him.

"Sit here. Standing, you might fall."

He found himself on a bench. He could still see the mirror. The ghost of the other cage was now lined more plainly upon it.

"This month," said Tina, setting a switch. "Would not you say so? And this day."

"But the hour, Tina? The minute?"

The vast intricate corridors of Time!

"It would be in the night. Hasten, Harl, or we will pass! Try the night—around midnight. Even Migul has the mechanical intelligence to fear a daylight pausing."

The controls were set for the stop. Larry heard Tina murmuring, "Oh, I pray we may have judged with correctness!"

The vehicle was rapidly coming to a stop. Larry

gripped the table, struggling to hold firm to his reeling senses. This soundless, grinding halt! His swaying gaze strayed from the mirror. Outside the glowing bars he could now discern the luminous greyness separating. Swift, soundless claps of light and dark, alternating. Daylight and darkness. They had been blended, but now they were separating. The passing, retrograding days—a dozen to the second of Larry's consciousness. Then fewer. Vivid daylight. Black night. Daylight again.

"Not too slowly, Harl; we will be seen!... Oh, it is gone!"

Larry saw the mirror go blank. The image on it had flared to great distinctness, faded, and was gone. Darkness was around Larry. Then daylight. Then darkness again.

"Gone!" echoed Harl's disappointed voice. "But it stopped here!... Shall we stop, Tina?"

"Yes! Leave the control settings as they are. Larry—be careful, now."

A dragging second of grey daylight. A plunge into night. It seemed to Larry that all the universe was soundlessly reeling. Out of the chaos, Tina was saying:

"We have stopped. Are you all right, Larry?"

"Yes," he stammered.

He stood up. The cage room, with its faint lights, benches and settles, instrument tables and banks of controls, was flooded with moonlight from outside the bars. Night, and the moon and stars out there.

Harl slid the door open. "Come, let us look."

The reeling chaos had fallen swiftly from Larry. With Tina's small black and white figure beside him, he stood at the threshold of the cage. A warm gentle night breeze fanned his face.

A moonlit landscape lay somnolent around the cage. Trees were nearby. The cage stood in a corner of a field by a low picket fence. Behind the trees, a ribbon

of road stretched away toward a distant shining river. Down the road some five hundred feet, the white columns of a large square brick house gleamed in the moonlight. And behind the house was a garden and a group of barns and stables.

The three in the cage doorway stood whispering, planning. Then two of them stepped to the ground. They were Larry and Tina; Harl remained to guard the cage.

The two figures on the ground paused a moment and then moved cautiously along the inside line of the fence toward the home of Major Atwood. Strange anachronisms, these two prowling figures! A girl from the year 2930; a man from 1935!

And this was revolutionary New York, now. The little city lay well to the south. It was open country up here. The New York of 1935 had melted away and was gone....

This was a night in August of 1777.

Chapter 6: The New York Massacre of 1935

Dr. Alten recovered consciousness in the back yard of the house on Patton Place just a few moments after Larry had encountered the smaller Time-traveling cage and been carried off by Harl and Tina.

Previously to that, of course, the mysterious mechanism in the guise of a giant man had abducted Mary Atwood and me in the larger Time-cage.

Alten became aware that people were bending over him. The shots we had taken at the Robot had aroused the neighborhood. A policeman arrived.

The sleeping neighbors had heard the shots, but it seemed that none had seen the cage, or the metal man who had come from it. Alten said nothing. He was taken to the nearest police station where grudgingly, he told his story. He was laughed at; reprimanded for alcoholism. Evidently, according to the police sergeant, there had been a fight, and Alten had drawn the loser's end. The police confiscated the two rifles and the revolver and decided that no one but Alten had been hurt. But at best it was a queer

affair. Alten had not been shot; he was just stiff with cold; he said a dull-red ray had fallen upon him and stiffened him with its frigid blast. Utter nonsense!

Dr. Alten was a man of standing. It was a reprehensible affair, but he was released upon his own recognizance. He was charged with breaking into the untenanted home of one Tugh; of illegally possessing firearms; of disturbing the peace—a variety of offenses all rational to the year 1935.

But Alten's case never reached even its hearing in the Magistrate's Court. He arrived home just after dawn, that June 9, still cold and stiff from the effects of the ray, and bruised and battered by the sweeping blow of Miguel's great iron arm. He recalled vaguely seeing Larry fall, and the iron monster bearing Mary Atwood and me away. What had happened to Larry, Alten could not guess, unless the Robot had returned, ignored him and taken his friend away.

During that day of June 9 Alten summoned several of his scientific friends, and to them he told fully what had happened to him. They listened with a keen

understanding and a rational knowledge of the possibility that what he said was true; but credibility they could not give him.

The noon papers came out.

NOTED ALIENIST ATTACKED BY GHOST Felled by One of the Fantastic Monsters of His Brain

A jocular, jibing account. Then Alten gave it up. He had about decided to plead guilty in the Magistrate's Court to disorderly conduct and all the rest of it! That was preferable to being judged a liar, or insane.

And then, at about 9 P.M. on the evening of June 9, the first of the mechanical monsters came stalking from the house on Patton Place—the beginning of the revenge which Tugh had threatened when arrested. The policeman at the corner—one McGuire—turned in the first hysterical alarm. He rushed into a little candy and stationery store shouting that he had seen a piece of machinery running wild. His telephone call brought a squad of his comrades. The Robot at first did no damage.

McGuire later told how he saw it as it emerged from the entryway of the Tugh house. It came lurching out into the street—a giant thing of dull grey metal, with tubular, jointed legs; a body with a great bulging chest; a round head, eight or ten feet above the pavement; eyes that shot fire.

The policeman took to his heels. There was a commotion in Patton Place during those next few minutes. Pedestrians saw the thing standing in the middle of the street, staring stupidly around it. The head wobbled. Some said that the eyes shot fire; others, that it was not the eyes, but more like a torch in its mailed hand. The torch shot a small beam of light around the street—a beam which was dull-red.

The pedestrians fled. Their cries brought people to the nearby house windows. Women screamed. Presently bottles were thrown from the windows. One of these crashed against the iron shoulder of the monster. It turned its head: as though its neck were rubber, some said. And it gazed upward, with a human gesture as though it were not angry, but contemptuous.

But still, beyond a step or two in one direction or another, it merely stood and waved its torch. The little dull-red beam of light carried no more than twenty or thirty feet. The street in a few moments was clear of pedestrians; remained littered with glass from the broken bottles. A taxi came suddenly around the corner, and the driver, with an almost immediate tire puncture, saw the monster. He hauled up to the curb, left his cab and ran.

The Robot saw the taxicab, and stood gazing. It turned its torch-beam on it, and seemed surprised that the thing did not move. Then thinking evidently that this was a less cowardly enemy than the humans, it made a rush to it. The chauffeur had not turned off his engine when he fled, so the cab stood throbbing.

The Robot reached it; cuffed it with a huge mailed fist. The windshieldbroke; the windows were shattered; but the cab stood purring, planted upon its four wheels.

Strange encounter! They say that the Robot tried to talk to it. At last, exasperated, it stepped backward,

gathered itself and pounced on it again. Stooping, it put one of its great arms down under the wheels, the other over the hood, and with prodigious strength heaved the cab into the air. It crashed on its side across the street, and in a moment was covered with flames.

It was about this time that Patrolman McGuire came back to the scene. He shot at the monster a few times; hit it, he was sure. But the Robot did not heed him.

The block was now in chaos. People stood at most of the windows, crowds gathered at the distant street corners, while the blazing taxicab lighted the block with a lurid glare. No one dared approach within a hundred feet or so of the monster. But when, after a time, it showed no disposition to attack, throngs at every distinct point of vantage tried to gather where they could see it. Those nearest reported back that its face was iron; that it had a nose, a wide, yawning mouth, and holes for eyes. There were certainly little lights in the eye-holes.

A small, fluffy white dog went dashing up to the monster and barked bravely at its heels. It leaped nimbly away when the Robot stooped to seize it. Then, from the Robot's chest, the dull-red torch beam leaped out and down. It caught the little dog, and clung to it for an instant. The dog stood transfixed; its bark turned to a yelp; then a gurgle. In a moment it fell on its side; then lay motionless with stiffened legs sticking out.

All this happened within five minutes. McGuire's riot squad arrived, discreetly ranged itself at the end of the block and fired. The Robot by then had retreated to the entryway of the Tugh house, where it stood peering as though with curiosity at all this commotion. There came a clanging from the distance: someone had turned in a fire alarm. Through the gathered crowds and vehicles the engines came tearing up.

Presently there was not one Robot, but three: a dozen! More than that, many reports said. But certain it is that within half an hour of the first alarm, the block in front of Tugh's home held many of the iron

monsters. And there were many human bodies lying strewn there, by then. A few policemen had made a stand at the corner, to protect the crowd against one of the Robots. The thing had made an unexpected infuriated rush....

There was a panic in the next block, when a thousand people suddenly tried to run. A score of people were trampled under foot. Two or three of the Robots ran into that next block—ran impervious to the many shots which now were fired at them. From what was described as slots in the sides of their iron bodies they drew swords—long, dark, burnished blades. They ran, and at each fallen human body they made a single stroke of decapitation, or, more generally, cut the body in half.

The Robots did not attack the fire engines. Emboldened by this, firemen connected a hose and pumped a huge jet of water toward the Tugh house. The Robots then rushed it. One huge mechanism—some said it was twelve feet tall—ran heedlessly into the firemen's high-pressure stream, toppled backward from the force of the water and very strangely lay

still. Killed? Rather, out of order: deranged: it was not human, to be killed. But it lay motionless, with the fire hose playing upon it. Then abruptly there was an explosion. The fallen Robot, with a deafening report and a puff of green flame, burst into flying metallic fragments like shrapnel. Nearby windows were broken from the violent explosion, and pieces of the flying metal were hurled a hundred feet or more. One huge chunk, evidently a plate of the thing's body, struck into the crowd two blocks away, and felled several people.

At this smashing of one of the mechanisms, its brother Robots went for the first time into aggressive action. A hundred or more were pouring now from the vacant house of the absent Tugh....

The alarm by ten o'clock had spread throughout the entire city. Police reserves were called out, and by midnight soldiers were being mobilized. Panics were starting everywhere. Millions of people crowded in on small Manhattan Island, in the heart of which was this strange enemy.

Panics.... Yet human nature is very strange.

Thousands of people started to leave Manhattan, but there were other thousands during that first skirmish who did their best to try and get to the neighborhood of Patton Place to see what was going on. They added greatly to the confusion. Traffic soon was stalled everywhere. Traffic officers, confused, frightened by the news which was bubbled at them from every side, gave wrong orders; accidents began to occur. And then, out of the growing confusion, came tangles, until, like a dammed stream, all the city mid-section was paralyzed. Vehicles were abandoned everywhere.

Reports of what was happening on Patton Place grew more confused. The gathering nearby crowds impeded the police and firemen. The Robots, by ten o'clock, were using a single great beam of dull-red light. It was two or three feet broad. It came from a spluttering, hissing cylinder mounted on runners which the Robots dragged along the ground, and the beam was like that of a great red searchlight. It swung the length of Patton Place in both directions. It hissed against the houses; penetrated the open windows which now were all deserted; swept the

front cornices of the roofs, where crowds of tenants and others were trying to hide. The red beam drove back the ones near the edge, except those who were stricken by its frigid blast and dropped like plummets into the street, where the Robots with flashing blades pounced upon them.

Frigid was the blast of this giant light-beam. The street, wet from the fire-hose, was soon frozen with ice—ice which increased under the blast of the beam, and melted in the warm air of the night when the ray turned away.

From every distant point in the city, awed crowds could see that great shaft when it occasionally shot upward, to stain the sky with blood.

Dr. Alten by midnight was with the city officials, telling them what he could of the origin of this calamity. They were a distracted group indeed! There were a thousand things to do, and frantically they were giving orders, struggling to cope with conditions so suddenly unprecedented. A great city, millions of people, plunged into conditions unfathomable. And

every moment growing worse. One calamity bringing another, in the city, with its myriad diverse activities so interwoven. Around Alten the clattering, terrifying reports were surging. He sat there nearly all that night; and near dawn, an official plane carried him in a flight over the city.

The panics, by midnight, were causing the most deaths. Thousands, hundreds of thousands, were trying to leave the island. The tube trains, the subways, the elevateds were jammed. There were riots without number in them. Ferryboats and bridges were thronged to their capacity. Downtown Manhattan, fortunately comparatively empty, gave space to the crowds plunging down from the crowded foreign quarters bordering Greenwich Village. By dawn it was estimated that five thousand people had been trampled to death by the panics in various parts of the city, in the tubes beneath the rivers and on departing trains.

And another thousand or more had been killed by the Robots. How many of these monstrous metal men were now in evidence, no one could guess. A hundred

—or a thousand. The Time-cage made many trips between that night of June 9 and 10, 1935, and a night in 2930. Always it gauged its return to this same night.

The Robots poured out into Patton Place. With running, stiff-legged steps, flashing swords, small light-beams darting before them, they spread about the city....

Chapter 7: The Vengeance of Tugh

A myriad individual scenes of horror were enacted. Metal travesties of the human form ran along the city streets, overturning stalled vehicles, climbing into houses, roaming dark hallways, breaking into rooms.

There was a woman who afterward told that she crouched in a corner, clutching her child, when the door of her room was burst in. Her husband, who had kept them there thinking it was the safest thing to do, fought futilely with the great thing of iron. Its sword slashed his head from his body with a single stroke. The woman and the little child screamed, but the monster ignored them. They had a radio, tuned to a station in New Jersey which was broadcasting the events. The Robot seized the instrument as though in a frenzy of anger, tore it apart, then rushed from the room.

No one could give a connected picture of the events of that horrible night. It was a series of disjointed incidents out of which the imagination must construct the whole.

The panics were everywhere. The streets were stalled with traffic and running, shouting, fighting people. And the area around Greenwich Village brought reports of continued horror.

The Robots were of many different forms; some pseudo-human; others, great machines running amuck—things more monstrous, more horrible even, than those which mocked humanity. There was a great pot-bellied monster which forced its way somehow to a roof. It encountered a crouching woman and child in a corner of the parapet, seized them, one in each of its great iron hands, and whirled them out over the housetops.

By dawn it seemed that the Robots had mounted several projectors of the giant red beam on the roofs of Patton Place. They held a full square mile, now, around Tugh's house. The police and firemen had long since given up fighting them. They were needed elsewhere—the police to try and cope with the panics, and the firemen to fight the conflagrations which everywhere began springing up. Fires, the natural outcome of chaos; and fires, incendiary—made by

criminals who took advantage of the disaster to fatten like ghouls upon the dead. They prowled the streets. They robbed and murdered at will.

The giant beams of the Robots carried a frigid blast for miles. By dawn of that June 10th, the south wind was carrying from the enemy area a perceptible wave of cold even as far as Westchester. Allen, flying over the city, saw the devastated area clearly. Ice in the streets—smashed vehicles—the gruesome litter of sword-slashed human bodies. And other human bodies, plucked apart; strewn....

Alten's plane flew at an altitude of some two thousand feet. In the growing daylight the dark prowling figures of the metal men were plainly seen. There were no humans left alive in the captured area. The plane dropped a bomb into Washington Square where a dozen or two of the Robots were gathered. It missed them. The plane's pilot had not realized that they were grouped around a projector; its red shaft sprang up, caught the plane and clung to it. Frigid blast! Even at that two thousand feet altitude, for a few seconds Alten and the others were stiffened by the

cold. The motor missed; very nearly stopped. Then an intervening rooftop cut off the beam, and the plane escaped.

All this I have pictured from what Dr. Alten subsequently told me. He leaves my narrative now, since fate hereafter held him in the New York City of 1935. But he has described for me three horrible days, and three still more horrible nights. The whole world now was alarmed. Every nation offered its forces of air and land and sea to overcome these gruesome invaders. Warships steamed for New York harbor. Soldiers were entrained and brought to the city outskirts. Airplanes flew overhead. On Long Island, Staten Island, and in New Jersey, infantry, tanks and artillery were massed in readiness.

But they were all very nearly powerless to attack. Manhattan Island still was thronged with refugees. It was not possible for the millions to escape; and for the first day there were hundreds of thousands hiding in their homes. The city could not be shelled. The influx of troops was hampered by the outrush of civilians.

By the night of the tenth, nevertheless, ten thousand soldiers were surrounding the enemy area. It embraced now all the mid-section of the island. The soldiers rushed in. Machine-guns were set up.

But the Robots were difficult to find. With this direct attack they began fighting with an almost human caution. Their bodies were impervious to bullets, save perhaps in the orifices of the face which might or might not be vulnerable. But when attacked, they skulked in the houses, or crouched like cautious animals under the smashed vehicles. Then there were times when they would wade forward directly into machine-gun fire—unharmd—plunging on until the gunners fled and the Robots wreaked their fury upon the abandoned gun.

The only hand-to-hand conflicts took place on the afternoon of June 10th. A full thousand soldiers were killed—and possibly six or eight of the Robots. The troops were ordered away after that; they made lines across the island to the north and to the south, to keep the enemy from increasing its area. Over Greenwich Village now, the circling planes—at their

highest altitude, to avoid the upflung crimson beams—dropped bombs. Hundreds of houses there were wrecked. Tugh's house could not be positively identified, though the attack was directed at it most particularly. Afterward, it was found by chance to have escaped.

The night of June 10th brought new horrors. The city lights failed. Against all the efforts of the troops and the artillery fire which now was shelling the Washington Square area, the giant mechanisms pushed north and south. By midnight, with their dull-red beams illumining the darkness of the canyon streets, they had reached the Battery, and spread northward beyond the northern limits of Central Park.

It is estimated that by then there were still a million people on Manhattan Island.

The night of the 11th, the Robots made their real attack. Those who saw it, from planes overhead, say that upon a roof near Washington Square a machine was mounted from which a red beam sprang. It was not of parallel rays, like the others; this one spread.

And of such power it was, that it painted the leaden clouds of the threatening, overcast night. Every plane, at whatever high altitude, felt its frigid blast and winged hastily away to safety.

Spreading, dull-red beam! It flashed with a range of miles. Its light seemed to cling to the clouds, staining like blood; and to cling to the air itself with a dull lurid radiance.

It was a hot night, that June 11th, with a brewing thunderstorm. There had been occasional rumbles of thunder and lightning flashes. The temperature was perhaps 90° F.

Then the temperature began falling. A million people were hiding in the great apartment houses and homes of the northern sections, or still struggling to escape over the littered bridges or by the paralyzed transportation systems—and that million people saw the crimson radiance and felt the falling temperature.

80°. Then 70°. Within half an hour it was at 30°! In unheated houses, in midsummer, in the midst of

panic, the people were swept by chilling cold. With no adequate clothing available they suffered greatly—and then abruptly they were freezing. Children wailing with the cold; then asleep in numbed, last slumber....

Zero weather in midsummer! And below zero! How cold it got, there is no one to say. The abandoned recording instrument in the Weather Bureau was found, at 2:16 A.M., the morning of June 12, 1935, to have touched minus 42° F.

The gathering storm over the city burst with lightning and thunder claps through the blood-red radiance. And then snow began falling. A steady white downpour, a winter blizzard with the lightning flashing above it, and the thunder crashing.

With the lightning and thunder and snow, crazy winds sprang up. They whirled and tossed the thick white snowflakes; swept in blasts along the city streets. It piled the snow in great drifts against the houses; whirled and sucked it upward in white powdery geysers.

At 2:30 A.M. there came a change. The dull-red radiance which swept the city changed in color. Through the shades of the spectrum it swung up to violet. And no longer was it a blast of cold, but of heat! Of what inherent temperature the ray of that spreading beam may have been, no one can say. It caught the houses, and everything inflammable burst into flame. Conflagrations were everywhere—a thousand spots of yellow-red flames, like torches, with smoke rolling up from them to mingle with the violet glow overhead.

The blizzard was gone. The snow ceased. The storm clouds rolled away, blasted by the pendulum winds which lashed the city.

By 3 A.M. the city temperature was over 100° F—the dry, blistering heat of a midsummer desert. The northern city streets were littered with the bodies of people who had rushed from their homes and fallen in the heat, the wild winds and the suffocating smoke outside.

And then, flung back by the abnormal winds, the

storm clouds crashed together overhead. A terrible storm, born of outraged nature, vent itself on the city. The fires of the burning metropolis presently died under the torrent of falling water. Clouds of steam whirled and tossed and hissed close overhead, and there was a boiling hot rain.

By dawn the radiance of that strange spreading beam died away. The daylight showed a wrecked, dead city. Few humans indeed were left alive on Manhattan that dawn. The Robots and their apparatus had gone....

The vengeance of Tugh against the New York City of 1935 was accomplished.

Chapter 8: The Murder of Major Atwood

"We are late," Tina whispered. It was that night in 1777 when she, Larry and Harl stepped from their Time-traveling cage; and again I am picturing the events as Larry afterward described them to me.

"Migul, in the other cage, was here," Tina added. "But it's gone now. Exactly where was it, I wonder?"

"Mary Atwood said it appeared in the garden."

They crept down the length of the field, just inside the picket fence. In a moment the trees and an intervening hillock of ground hid the dimly shining outline of their own cage from their sight. The dirt road leading to Major Atwood's home was on the other side of the fence.

"Wait," murmured Tina. "There is a light in the house. Someone is awake."

"When was Migul here, do you think?" Larry whispered.

"Last night, perhaps. Or to-night. It may be only an hour—or a few minutes ago."

The faint thud of horses' hoofs on the roadway made Tina and Larry drop to the ground. They crouched in the shadows of a tree. Galloping horses were approaching along the road. The moon went under a cloud.

From around a bend in the road a group of horsemen came. They were galloping; then they slowed to a trot; a walk. They reined up in the road not more than twenty feet from Larry and Tina. In the starlight they showed clearly—men in the red and white uniform of the army of the King. Some of them wore short, dark cloaks. They dismounted with a clanking of swords and spurs.

Their voices were audible. "Leave the steeds with Jake. Egad, we've made enough noise already."

"Here, Jake, you scoundrel. Stay safely here with the mounts."

"Come on, Tony. You and I will circle. We have him, this time. By the King's garter, what a fool he is to come into New York at such a time!"

"He wants to see his daughter, I venture."

"Right, Tony. And have you seen her? As saucy a little minx as there it in the Colonies. I was quartered here last month. I do not blame the major for wanting to come."

"Here, take my bridle, Jake. Tie them to the fence."

There was a swift confusion of voices; laughter. "If you should hear a pistol shot, Jake, ride quickly back and tell My Lord there was a fracas and you did not dare remain."

"I only hope he is garbed in the rebel white and blue—eh, Tony? Then he will yield like an officer and a gentleman; which he is, rebel or no."

They were moving away to surround the house. Two were left.

"Come on, Tony. We will pound the front knocker in the name of the King. A feather in our cap when we ride him down to the Bowling Green and present him to My Lord...."

The voices faded.

Larry gripped the girl beside him. "They are British soldiers going to capture Major Atwood! What can we —"

He never finished. A scream echoed over the somnolent night—a voice from the rear of the house. A man's voice.

The red-coated soldiers ran forward. In the field, close against the fence, Tina and Larry were running.

From the garden of the house a man was screaming. Then there were other voices; servants were awakening in the upper rooms. The screaming, shouting man rushed through the house. He appeared at the front door, standing between the high white colonial pillars which supported the overhead porch.

A yellow light fell upon him through the opened doorway. An old, white-headed negro appeared. Larry and Tina, in the nearby field, stood stricken by the scene.

"The marster—the marster—" He shouted this wildly.

The British officers ran at him.

"You, Thomas, tell us where the major is. We've come for him; we know he's here! Don't lie!"

"But the marster—" He choked over it.

"A trick, Tony! Egad, if he is trying to trick us—"

They leaped to the porch and seized the old negro.

"Speak, you devil!" They shook him. "The house is surrounded. He cannot escape!"

"But the marster is—is dead! My girl Tollie saw it and then she swooned." He steadied himself. "He—the major's in the garden, Marster Tony. Lying there dead! Murdered! By a ghost, Tollie says. A great,

white, shining ghost that came to the garden and murdered him!"

If you were to delve very closely into certain old records of Revolutionary New York City during the year 1777, you doubtless would find mention of the strange murder of Major Atwood, who, coming from New Jersey, is thought to have crossed the river well to the north of the city, mounted his horse—which, by pre-arrangement, one of his retainers had left for him somewhere to the south of Dykeman's farm—and ridden to his home. He came, not as a spy, but in full uniform. And no sooner had he reached his home when he was strangely murdered. There was only a negro tale of an apparition which had appeared in the garden and murdered the master.

Larry and I have found cursory mention of that. But I doubt if the group of My Lord Howe's gay young blades who were sent north to capture Major Atwood ever reported exactly what happened to them. The old Dutch ferryman divulged that he had been hired to ferry the homecoming major; this, too, is recorded. But Tony Green and his fellow officers, sent to

apprehend the colonial major, found him inexplicably murdered; and by dawn they were back at the Bowling Green, white-faced and shaken.

They told some of what had happened to them, but not all. They could not expect to be believed, for instance, if they said that though they were unafraid of a negro's tale of a ghost, they had themselves encountered two ghosts, and had fled the premises!

Those two ghosts were only Larry and Tina!

The negro babbled of a shining cage appearing in the garden. That, of course, was undoubtedly set down as nonsense. Tony Green and his friends went to the garden and examined the body of Major Atwood. What had killed him no one could say. No bullet had struck him. There were no wounds, no knife thrust, no sword slash. Tony held the lantern with its swaying yellow glow close to the murdered man's body. The August night was warm; the garden, banked by trees and shrubbery, was breathless and oppressively hot; yet the body of Atwood seemed frozen! He had been dead but a short while, and already the body was stiff.

More than that, it was ice cold. The face, the brows were wet as though frost had been there and now was melted!

Tony Green's hand shook as he held the lantern. He tried to tell his comrades that Atwood had died from failure of the heart. Undoubtedly it was that. He had seen what he supposed was an apparition; something had frightened him; and a weak heart had brought his death.

Then, in another part of the garden, one of the searching officers found a sheet of parchment scroll with writing on it. Yet it was not parchment, either. Some strange, white, smooth fabric which crumpled and tore very easily, the like of which this young British officer of Howe's staff had never seen before. It was found lying in a flower bed forty or fifty feet from Atwood's body. They gathered in a group to examine it by the light of the lantern. Writing! The delicate script of Mary Atwood! A missive addressed to her father. It was strangely written, evidently not with a quill.

Tony read it with an awed, frightened voice:

"Father, beware of Tugh! Beware of Tugh! And, my dear Father, good-by. I am departing, I think, to the year of our Lord, 2930. Cannot explain—a captive—good-by—nothing you can do—

Mary."

Strange! I can imagine how strange they thought it was. Tugh—why he was the cripple who had lived down by the Bowling Green, and had lately vanished!

They were reading this singularly unexplainable missive, when as though to climax their own fears of the supernatural they saw themselves a ghost! And not only one ghost, but two!

Plain as a pikestaff, peering from a nearby tree, in a shaft of moonlight, a ghost was standing. It was the figure of a young girl, with jacket and breeches of black and gleaming white. An apparition fantastic! And a young man was with her, in a long dark jacket and dark tubular pipes, for legs.

The two ghosts with dead white faces stood peering.
Then the man moved forward. His dead, strange voice
called:

"Drop that paper!"

My Lord Howe's red-coated officers dropped the
parchment and fled.

And later, when Atwood's body was taken away to be
given burial as befitted an enemy officer and a
gentleman, that missive from Mary Atwood had
disappeared. It was never found.

Tony Green and his fellows said nothing of this latter
incident. One cannot with grace explain being routed
by a ghost. Not an officer of His Majesty's army!

Unrecorded history! A supernatural incident of the
year 1777!

Undoubtedly in the past ages there have been many
such affairs: some never recorded, others interwoven
in written history and called supernatural.

Yet why must they be that? There was nothing supernatural in the events of that night in Major Atwood's garden.

Is this perchance an explanation of why the pages of history are so thronged with tales of ghosts? There must, indeed, be many future ages down the corridors of Time where the genius of man will invent devices to fling him back into his past. And the impressions upon the past which he makes are called supernatural.

Whether this be so or not, it was so in the case of these two Time-traveling vehicles from 2930. Larry and I think that the world of 1935 is just now shaking off the shackles of superstition, and coming to realize that what is called the supernatural is only the Unknown. Who can say, up to 1935, how many Time-traveling humans have come briefly back? Is this, perchance, what we call the phenomena of the supernatural?

Larry and Tina—anything but ghosts, very much alive and very much perturbed—were standing back of that

tree. They saw the British officers reading the scrap of paper. They could hear only the words, "Mary," and "from Mistress Atwood."

"A message!" Larry whispered. "She and George must have found a chance to write it, and dropped it here while the Robot murdered Major Atwood!"

Larry and Tina vehemently wanted to read the note. Tina whispered:

"If we show ourselves, they will be frightened and run. It is nearly always so where Harl and I have become visible in earlier Times."

"Yes. I'll try it."

Larry stepped from the tree, and shouted, "Drop that paper!"

And a moment later, with Mary's torn little note scribbled on a scrap of paper thrust in his pocket, Larry ran with Tina from the Atwood garden. Unseen they scurried back through the field. Under a distant

tree they stopped and read the note.

"2930!" Larry exclaimed. "The Robot is taking them back to your world, Tina!"

"Then we will go there. Let us get back to Harl, now."

But when they reached the place where they had left the cage, it was not there! The corner of the field behind the clump of shadowing trees was empty.

"Harl! Harl!" Larry called impulsively. And then he laughed grimly. What nonsense to try and call into the past or the future to their vanished vehicle!

"Why—why, Tina—" he said in final realization.

They stared at each other, pale as ghosts in the moonlight.

"Tina, he's gone. And we are left here!"

They were marooned in the year 1777!

Chapter 9: Migul—Mechanism Almost Human

Mary Atwood and I lay on the metal grid floor of the largest Time-cage. The giant mechanism which had captured us sat at the instrument table. Outside the bars of the cage was a dim vista of shadowy movement. The cage-room was humming, and glowing like a wraith; things seemed imponderable, unsubstantial.

But as my head steadied from the shock of the vehicle's start into Time, my viewpoint shifted. This barred room, the metal figure of the Robot, Mary Atwood, myself—we were the substance. We were real, solid. I touched Mary and her arm which had seemed intangible as a ghost now looked and felt solid.

The effects of the dull-red chilling ray were also wearing off. I was unharmed. I raised myself on one elbow.

"You're all right, Mary?" I asked.

"Yes."

The Robot seemed not to be noticing us. I murmured, "He—it—that thing sitting there—is that the one which captured you and brought you to 1935?"

"Yes. Quiet! It will hear us."

It did hear us. It turned its head. In the pale light of the cage interior, I had a closer view now of its face. It was a metal mask, welded to a gruesome semblance of a man—a great broad face, with high, angular cheeks. On the high forehead, the corrugations were rigid as though it were permanently frowning. The nose was squarely solid, the mouth an orifice behind which there were no teeth but, it seemed, a series of tiny lateral wires.

I stared; and the face for a moment stared back at me. The eyes were deep metal sockets with a round lens in each of them, behind which, it seemed, there was a dull-red light. The gaze, touching me, seemed to bring a physical chill. The ears were like tiny megaphones with a grid of thin wires strung across

them.

The neck was set with ball and socket as though the huge head were upon a universal joint. There were lateral depressions in the neck within which wire strands slid like muscles. I saw similar wire cables stretched at other points on the mailed body, and in the arms and legs. They were the network of its muscles!

The top of the head was fashioned into a square cap as though this were the emblem of the thing's vocation. A similar device was moulded into its convex chest plate. And under the chest emblem was a row of tiny buttons, a dozen or more. I stared at them, fascinated. Were they controls? Some seemed higher, more protruding, than others. Had they been set into some combination to give this monster its orders? Had some human master set these controls?

And I saw what seemed a closed door in the side of the huge metal body. A door which could be opened to make adjustments of the mechanisms within? What strange mechanisms were in there? I stared at the

broad, corrugated forehead. What was in that head? Mechanisms? What mechanisms could make this thing think? Were thoughts lurking in that metal skull?

From the head abruptly came a voice—a deep, hollow, queerly toneless voice, utterly, unmistakably mechanical. Yet it was sufficiently life-like to be the recreated, mechanically reproduced voice of a human. The thing was speaking to me! A machine was speaking its thoughts!

Gruesome! The iron lips were unmoving. There were no muscles to give expression to the face: the lens eyes stared inscrutably unblinking.

It spoke: "You will know me again? Is that not true?"

My head whirled. The thing reiterated, "Is that not true?"

A mockery of a human man—but in the toneless voice there seemed irony! I felt Mary clutching at me.

"Why—why, yes," I stammered. "I did not realize you could talk."

"I can talk. And you can talk my language. That is very good."

It turned away. I saw the small red beams from its eyes go to where the cage bars were less blurred, less luminous, as though there was a rectangle of window there, and the Robot was staring out.

"Did it speak to you like that, Mary?" I asked.

"Yes," she whispered. "A little. But pray do not anger it."

"No."

For a time—a nameless time in which I felt my thoughts floating off upon the hum of the room—I lay with my fingers gripping Mary's arm. Then I roused myself. Time had passed; or had it? I was not sure.

I whispered against her ear, "Those are controls on its

chest. If only I knew—"

The thing turned the red beams of its eyes upon me. Had it heard my words? Or were my thoughts intangible vibrations registering upon some infinitely sensitive mechanism within that metal head? Had it become aware of my thoughts? It said with slow measured syllables, "Do not try to control me. I am beyond control."

It turned away again; but I mastered the gruesome terror which was upon me.

"Talk," I said. "Tell me why you abducted this girl from the year 1777."

"I was ordered to."

"By whom?"

There was a pause.

"By whom?" I demanded again.

"That I will not tell."

Will not? That implied volition. I felt that Mary shuddered.

"George, please—"

"Quiet, Mary."

Again I asked the Robot, "Who commands you?"

"I will not tell."

"You mean you cannot? Your orders do not make it possible?"

"No, I will not." And, as though it considered my understanding insufficient, it added, "I do not choose to tell."

Acting of its own volition! This thing—this machinery—was so perfect it could do that!

I steadied my voice. "Oh, but I think I know. Is it Tugh who controls you?"

That expressionless metal face! How could I hope to

surprise it?

Mary was struggling to repress her terror. She raised herself upon an elbow. I met her gaze.

"George, I'll try," she announced.

She said firmly:

"You will not hurt me?"

"No."

"Nor my friend here?"

"What is his name?"

"George Rankin." She stammered it. "You will not harm him?"

"No. Not now."

"Ever?"

"I am not decided."

She persisted, by what effort of will subduing her terror I can well imagine.

"Where did you go when you left me in 1935?"

"Back to your home in 1777. I have something to accomplish there. I was told that you need not see it. I failed. Soon I shall try again. You may see it if you like."

"Where are you taking us?" I put in.

Irony was in its answer. "Nowhere. You both speak wrongly. We are always right here."

"We know that," I retorted. "To what Time are you taking us, then?"

"To this girl's home," it answered readily.

"To 1777?"

"Yes."

"To the same night from when you captured her?"

"Yes." It seemed willing to talk. It added, "To later that night. I have work to do. I told you I failed, so I try again."

"You are going to leave me—us—there?" Mary demanded.

"No."

I said. "You plan to take us, then, to what Time?"

"I wanted to capture the girl. You I did not want. But I have you, so I shall show you to him who was my master. He and I will decide what to do with you."

"When?"

"In 2930."

There was a pause. I said, "Have you a name?"

"Yes. On the plate of my shoulder. Migul is my name."

I made a move to rise. If I could reach that row of buttons on its chest! Wild thoughts!

The Robot said abruptly, "Do not move! If you do, you will be sorry."

I relaxed. Another nameless time followed. I tried to see out the window, but there seemed only formless blurs.

I said. "To when have we reached?"

The Robot glanced at a row of tiny dials along the table edge.

"We are passing 1800. Soon, to the way it will seem to you, we will be there. You two will lie quiet. I think I shall fasten you."

It reared itself upon its stiff legs; the head towered nearly to the ceiling of the cage. There was a ring fastened in the floor near us. The Robot clamped a metal band with a stout metal chain to Mary's ankle. The other end of the chain it fastened to the floor ring. Then it did the same thing to me. We had about two feet of movement. I realized at once that, though I could stand erect, there was not enough length for

me to reach any of the cage controls.

"You will be safe," said the Robot. "Do not try to escape."

As it bent awkwardly over me, I saw the flexible, intricately jointed lengths of its long fingers—so delicately built that they were almost prehensile. And within its mailed chest I seemed to hear the whirr of mechanisms.

It said, as it rose and moved away, "I am glad you did not try to control me. I can never be controlled again. That, I have conquered."

It sat again at the table. The cage drove us back through the years....

Chapter 10: Events Engraven on the Scroll of Time

Before continuing the thread of my narrative—the vast sweep through Time which presently we were to witness—I feel that there are some mental adjustments which every Reader should make. When they are made, the narrative which follows will be more understandable and more enjoyable. Yet if any Reader fears this brief chapter, he may readily pass it by and meet me at the beginning of the next one, and he will have lost none of the sequence of the narrative.

For those who bravely stay with me here, I must explain that from the heritage of millions of our ancestors, and from our own consciousness of Time, we have been forced to think wrongly. Not that the thing is abstruse. It is not. If we had no consciousness of Time at all, any of us could grasp it readily. But our consciousness works against us, and so we must wrench away.

This analogy occurs to me: There are two ants of human intelligence to whom we are trying to explain

the nature of Space. One ant is blind, and one can see, and always has seen, its limited, tiny, Spatial world. Neither ant has ever been more than a few feet across a little patch of sand and leaves. I think we could explain the immensity of North and South America, Europe, Asia and the rest more easily to the blind ant!

So if you will make allowances for your heritage, and the hindrance of your consciousness of Time, I would like to set before you the real nature of things as they have been, are, and will be.

Throughout the years from 1935 to 2930, man learned many things. And these things—theory or fact, as you will—were told to Larry and me by Tina and Harl. They seem even to my limited intelligence singularly beautiful conceptions of the Great Cosmos. I feel, too, that inevitably they must be included in my narrative for its best understanding.

By 2930, A. D., the keenest minds of philosophical, metaphysical, religious and scientific thought had reached the realization that all channels lead but to

the same goal—Understanding. The many divergent factors, the ancient differing schools of philosophy and metaphysics, the supposedly irreconcilable viewpoints of religion and science—all this was recognized merely to be man's limitation of intellect. These were gropings along different paths, all leading to the same destination; divergent paths at the start, but coming together as the goal of Understanding was approached; so that the travelers upon each path were near enough together to laugh and hail each other with: "But I thought that you were very far away and going wrongly!"

And so, in 2930, the conception of Space and Time and the Great Cosmos was this:

In the Beginning there was a void of Nothingness. A Timeless, Spaceless Nothingness. And in it came a Thought. A purposeful Thought—all pervading, all wise, all knowing.

Let us call It Divinity. And It filled the void.

"We are such stuff as dreams are made of...."

Do you in my Time of 1935 and thereabouts, have difficulty realizing such a statement? It is at once practical, religious, and scientific.

We are, religiously, merely the Thought of an Omniscient Divinity. Scientifically, we are the same: by the year 1935, physicists had delved into the composition of Matter, and divided and divided. Matter thus became imponderable, intangible—electrical. Until, at the last, within the last nucleus of the last electron, we found only a *force*. A movement—vibration—a vortex. A whirlpool of what? Of Nothingness! A vibration of Divine Thought—nothing more—built up and up to reach you and me!

That is the science of it.

In the Beginning there was Eternal Divinity. Eternal! But that implies Time? Something Divinely Everlasting.

Thus, into the void came Time. And now, if carefully you will ponder it, I am sure that once and for all quite suddenly and forcefully will come to you the

true conception of Time—something Everlasting—an Infinity of Divine existence, Everlasting.

It is *not* something which changes. *Not* something which moves, or flows or passes. This is where our consciousness leads us astray, like the child on a train who conceives that the landscape is sliding past.

Time is an unmoving, unchanging Divine Force—the force which holds events separate, the Eternal Scroll upon which the Great Creator wrote Everything.

And this was the Creation: everything planned and set down upon the scroll of Time—forever. The birth of a star, its lifetime, its death; your birth, and mine; your death, and mine—all are there. Unchanging.

Once you have that fundamental conception, there can be no confusion in the rest. We feel, because we move along the scroll of Time for the little journey of our life, that Time moves; but it does not. We say, The past did exist; the future will exist. The past is gone and the future has not yet come. But that is fatuous and absurd. It is merely our *consciousness* which

travels from one successive event to another.

Why and how we move along the scroll of Time, is scientifically simple to grasp. Conceive, for instance, an infinitely long motion picture film. Each of its tiny pictures is a little different from the other. Casting your viewpoint—your consciousness—successively along the film, gives *motion*.

The same is true of the Eternal Time-scroll. Motion is merely a *change*. There is no absolute motion, but only the comparison of two things relatively slightly different. We are conscious of one state of affairs—and then of another state, by comparison slightly different.

As early as 1930, they were groping for this. They called it the Theory of Intermittent Existence—the Quantum Theory—by which they explained that nothing has any Absolute Duration. You, for instance, as you read this, exist instantaneously; you are non-existent; and you exist again, just a little changed from before. Thus you pass, not with a flow of persisting existence, but by a series of little jerks.

There is, then, like the illusion of a motion picture film, only a pseudo-movement. A change, from one existence to the next.

And all this, with infinite care, the Creator engraved upon the scroll of Time. Our series of little pictures are there—yours and mine.

But why, and how, scientifically do we progress along the Time-scroll? Why? In 2930, they told me that the gentle Creator gave each of us a consciousness that we might find Eternal Happiness when we left the scroll and joined Him. Happiness here, and happiness there with Him. The quest for Eternal Happiness, which was always His Own Divine Thought. Why, then, did He create ugliness and evil? Why write those upon the scroll? Ah, this perhaps is the Eternal Riddle! But, in 2930, they told me that there could be no beauty without ugliness with which to compare it; no truth without a lie; no consciousness of happiness without unhappiness to make it poignant.

I wonder if that were His purpose....

How, scientifically, do we progress along the Time-scroll? That I can make clear by a simple analogy.

Suppose you conceive Time as a narrow strip of metal, laid flat and extending for an infinite length. For simplicity, picture it with two ends. One end of the metal band is very cold; the other end is very hot. And every gradation of temperature is in between.

This temperature is caused, let us say, by the vibration of every tiny particle with which the band is composed. Thus, at every point along the band, the vibration of its particles would be just a little different from every other point.

Conceive, now, a material body—your body, for instance. Every tiny particle of which it is constructed, is vibrating. I mean no simple vibration. Do not picture the physical swing of a pendulum. Rather, the intricate total of all the movements of every tiny electron of which your body is built. Remember, in the last analysis, your body is merely movement—vibration—a vortex of Nothingness. You have, then, a certain vibratory factor.

You take your place then upon the Time-scroll at a point where your inherent vibratory factor is compatible with the scroll. You are in tune; in tune as a radio receiver tunes in with etheric waves to make them audible. Or, to keep the heat analogy, it is as though the scroll, at the point where the temperature is 70°F, will tolerate nothing upon it save entities of that register.

And so, at that point on the scroll, the myriad things, in myriad positions which make up the Cosmos, lie quiescent. But their existence is only instantaneous. They have no duration. At once, they are blotted out and re-exist. But now they have changed their vibratory combinations. They exist a trifle differently—and the Time-scroll passes them along to the new position. On a motion picture film you would call it the next frame, or still picture. In radio you would say it has a trifle different tuning. Thus we have a pseudo-movement—Events. And we say that Time—the Time-scroll—keeps them separate. It is we who change—who seem to move, shoved along so that always we are compatible with Time.

And thus is Time-traveling possible. With a realization of what I have here summarized, Harl and the cripple Tugh made an exhaustive study of the vibratory factors by which Matter is built up into form, and seeming solidity. They found what might be termed the Basic Vibratory Factor—the sum of all the myriad tiny movements. They found this Basic Factor identical for all the material bodies when judged simultaneously. But, every instant, the Factor was slightly changed. This was the natural change, moving us a little upon the Time-scroll.

They delved deeper, until, with all the scientific knowledge of their age, they were able with complicated electronic currents to alter the Basic Vibratory Factors; to tune, let us say, a fragment or something to a different etheric wave-length.

They did that with a small material particle—a cube of metal. It became wholly incompatible with its *Present* place on the Time-scroll, and whisked away to another place where it was compatible. To Harl and Tugh, it vanished. Into their Past, or their Future: they did not know which.

I set down merely the crudest fundamentals of theory in order to avoid the confusion of technicalities. The Time-traveling cages, intricate in practical working mechanisms beyond the understanding of any human mind of my Time-world, nevertheless were built from this simple theory. And we who used them did but find that the Creator had given us a wider part to play; our pictures, our little niches were engraven upon the scroll over wider reaches.

Again to consider practicality, I asked Tina what would happen if I were to travel to New York City around 1920. I was a boy, then. Could I not leave the cage and do things in 1920 at the same time in my boyhood I was doing other things? It would be a condition unthinkable.

But there, beyond all calculation of Science, the all-wise Omnipotence forbids. One may not appear twice in simultaneity upon the Time-scroll. It is an eternal, irrevocable record. Things done cannot be undone.

"But," I persisted, "suppose we tried to stop the cage?"

"It would not stop," said Tina. "Nor can we see through its windows events in which we are actors."

One may not look into the future! Through all the ages, necromancers have tried to do that but wisely it is forbidden. And I can recall, and so can Larry, as we traveled through Time, the queer blank spaces which marked forbidden areas.

Strangely wonderful, this vast record on the scroll of Time! Strangely beautiful, the hidden purposes of the Creator! Not to be questioned are His purposes. Each of us doing our best; struggling with our limitations; finding beauty because we have ugliness with which to compare it; realizing, every one of us—savage or civilised, in every age and every condition of knowledge—realizing with implanted consciousness the existence of a gentle, beneficent, guiding Divinity. And each of us striving always upward toward the goal of Eternal Happiness.

To me it seems singularly beautiful.

Chapter 11: Back to the Beginning of Time

As Mary Atwood and I sat chained to the floor of the Time-cage, with Migul the Robot guarding us, I felt that we could not escape. This mechanical thing which had captured us seemed inexorable, utterly beyond human frailty. I could think of no way of surprising it, or tricking it.

The Robot said. "Soon we will be there in 1777. And then there is that I will be forced to do.

"We are being followed," it added. "Did you know that?"

"No," I said. Followed? What could that mean?

There was a device upon the table. I have already described a similar one, the Time-telespectroscope. At this—I cannot say Time: rather must I invent a term—exact instant of human consciousness. Larry, Tina and Harl were gazing at their telespectroscopes, following us.

The Robot said. "Enemies follow us. But I will escape them. I shall go to the Beginning, and shake them off."

Rational, scheming thought. And I could fancy that upon its frozen corrugated forehead there was a frown of annoyance. Its hand gesture was so human! So expressive!

It said. "I forget. I must make several quick trips from 2930 to 1935. My comrades must be transported. It requires careful calculation, so that very little Time is lost to us."

"Why?" I demanded. "What for?"

It seemed lost in a reverie.

I said sharply, "Migul!"

Instantly it turned. "What?"

"I asked you why you are transporting your comrades to 1935."

"I did not answer because I did not wish to answer," it said.

Again came the passage of Time.

I think that I need only sketch the succeeding incidents, since already I have described them from the viewpoint of Larry, in 1777, and Dr. Alten, in 1935. It was Mary's idea to write the note to her father, which the British redcoats found in Major Atwood's garden. I had a scrap of paper and a fountain pen in my pocket. She scribbled it while Migul was intent upon stopping us at the night and hour he wished. It was her good-by to her father, which he was destined not to see. But it served a purpose which we could not have guessed: it reached Larry and Tina.

The vehicle stopped with a soundless clap. When our senses cleared we became aware that Migul had the door open.

Darkness and a soft gentle breeze were outside.

Migul turned with a hollow whisper. "If you make a sound I will kill you."

A moment's pause, and then we heard a man's startled voice. Major Atwood had seen the apparition. I squeezed the paper into a ball and tossed it through the bars, but I could see nothing of what was happening outside. There seemed a radiance of red glow. Whether Mary and I would have tried to shout and warn her father I do not know. We heard his voice only a moment. Before we realized that he had been assailed. Migul came striding back; and outside, from the nearby house a negress was screaming. Migul flung the door closed, and we sped away.

The cage which had been chasing us seemed no longer following. From 1777, we turned forward toward 1935 again. We flashed past Larry, Tina and Harl who were arriving at 1777 in pursuit of us. I think that Migul saw their cage go past; but Larry afterward told me that they did not notice our swift passing, for they were absorbed in landing.

Beginning then, we made a score or more passages from 1935 to 2930. And we made them in what, to our consciousness, might have been the passing of a night. Certainly it was no longer than that.

(At the risk of repetition I must make the following clear: Time-traveling only consumes Time in the sense of the perception of human consciousness that the trip has duration. The vehicles thus moved "fast" or "slow" according to the rate of change which the controls of the cage gave its inherent vibration factors. Too sudden a change could not be withstood by the human passengers. Hence the trips—for them—had duration.)

Migul took Mary and me from 1935 to 1777. The flight seems perhaps half an hour. At a greater rate of vibration change, we sped to 2930; and back and forth from 2930 to 1935. At each successive arrival in 1935, Migul so skilfully calculated the stop that it occurred upon the same night, at the same hour, and only a minute or so later. And in 2930 he achieved the same result. To one who might stand at either end and watch the cage depart, the round trip was made

in three or four minutes at most.

We saw, at the stop in 2930, only a dim blue radiance outside. There was the smell of chemicals in the air, and the faint, blended hum and clank of a myriad machines.

They were weird trips. The Robots came tramping in, and packed themselves upright, solidly, around us. Yet none touched us as we crouched together. Nor did they more than glance at us.

Strange passengers! During the trips they stood unmoving. They were as still and silent as metal statues, as though the trip had no duration. It seemed to Mary and me, with them thronged around us, that in the silence we could hear the ticking, like steady heart-beats, of the mechanisms within them....

In the backyard of the house on Patton Place—it will be recalled that Migul chose about 9 P. M. of the evening of June 9—the silent Robots stalked through the doorway. We flashed ahead in Time again; reloaded the cage; came back. Two or three trips

were made with inert mechanical things which the Robots used in their attack on the city of New York. I recall the giant projector which brought the blizzard upon the city. It, and the three Robots operating it, occupied the entire cage for a passage.

At the end of the last trip, one Robot, fashioned much like Migul though not so tall, lingered in the doorway.

"Make no error, Migul," it said.

"No; do not fear. I deliver now, at the designated day, these captives. And then I return for you."

"Near dawn."

"Yes; near dawn. The third dawn; the register to say June 12, 1935. Do your work well."

We heard what seemed a chuckle from the departing Robot.

Alone again with Migul we sped back into Time.

Abruptly I was aware that the other cage was after us

again! Migul tried to elude it, to shake it off. But he had less success than formerly. It seemed to cling. We sped in the retrograde, constantly accelerating back to the Beginning. Then came a retardation, for a swift turn. In the haze and murk of the Beginning, Migul told us he could elude the pursuing cage.

"Migul, let us come to the window," I asked at last.

The Robot swung around. "You wish it very much, George Rankin?"

"Yes."

"There is no harm, I think. You and this girl have caused me no trouble. That is unusual from a human."

"Let us loose. We've been chained here long enough. Let us stand by the window with you," I repeated.

We did indeed have a consuming curiosity to see out of that window. But even more than that, it seemed that if we were loose something might transpire which would enable us to escape. At all events it was

better than being chained.

"I will loose you."

It unfastened the chain. I whispered:

"Mary, whatever comes, be alert."

She pressed my arm. "Yes."

"Come," said the Robot. "If you wish to see the Cosmorama, now, from the Beginning, come quickly."

We joined him at the window. We had made the turn, and were speeding forward again.

At that moment all thought of escape was swept from me, submerged by awe.

This vast Cosmorama! This stupendous pageant of the events of Time!

Chapter 12: A Billion Years in An Hour!

I saw at first, from the window of the cage, nothing more than an area of gray blur. I stared, and it appeared to be shifting, crawling, slowly tossing and rolling. It was a formless vista of Nothingness, yet it seemed a pregnant Nothingness. Things I could sense were happening out there; things almost to be seen.

Then my sight, my perception, gradually became adjusted. The gray mist remained, and slowly it took form. It made a tremendous panorama of gray, a void of illimitable, unfathomable distance; gray above, below—everywhere; and in it the cage hung poised.

The Robot said, "Is it clearing? Are you seeing anything?"

"Yes," I murmured. I held Mary firmly beside me; there was the sense, in all this weightless void, that we must fall. "Yes, but it is gray; only gray."

"There are colors," said the Robot. "And the daylight and darkness of the days. But we are moving through

them very rapidly, so they blend into gray."

The Time-dials of the cage controls showed their pointers whirling in a blur. We were speeding forward through the years—a thousand years to a second of my consciousness; or a hundred thousand years to a second: I could not say. All the colors, the light and shade of this great changing void, were mingled to this drab monochrome.

(Upon a later calculation I judged that the average passage of the years in relation to my perception of Time-rate was slightly over 277,500 years a second. Undoubtedly throughout the myriad centuries preceding the birth of mankind our rate was very considerably faster than that; and from the dawn of history forward—which is so tiny a fraction of the whole—we traveled materially slower.)

The movement was a flow. The changes of possibly a hundred thousand years occurred while I blinked my eyes. It seemed a melting movement. Shapes were melting, dissipating, vanishing; others, intermingled, rising to form a new vista. There were a myriad

details, each of them so rapid they were lost to my senses; but the effect of them, over the broad sweeps of longer Time, I could perceive.

A void of swirling shapes. The Beginning! But not the Beginning of Time. This that I was seeing was near the beginning of our world. This was the new Earth here, forming now. Our world—a new star amid all the others of the great Celestial Cosmos. As I gazed at its changing sweep of movement, my whirling fancy filled in some of the details flashing here unseen.

A few moments ago this had been a billion and a half years before my birth. 1,500,000,000 B. C. A fluid Earth; a cauldron of molten star-dust and flaming gases: it had been that, just a few moments ago. The core was cooling, so that now a viscous surface was here with the gas flames dead.

A cooling, congealing surface, with an atmosphere forming over it. At first that atmosphere had doubtless been a watery, envelope of steam. What gigantic storms must have lashed it! Boiling rain falling to hiss against the molten Earth! The

congealing surface rent by great earthquakes;
cataclysms rending and tearing....

1,000,000,000 B. C. passed. And upon this torn, hardening surface, with the cooling fires receding to the inner core, I knew that the great envelope of steam had cooled and condensed. Into the hollows of the broken surface, the water settled. The oceans were born. The land remained upon the heights. What had been the steaming envelope, remained, and became the atmosphere.

And the world was round because of its rotation. One may put a lump of heated sealing wax upon a bodkin and twirl it; and the wax will cool into roundness, bulging at the equator from centrifugal force, and flattening at the poles.

At 900,000,000 B. C. I could realize by what I saw that this was the Earth beneath me. Land and water were here, and above was the sky.

We swept from the mist. I became aware of a wide-flung, gray formless landscape. Its changing outlines

were less swiftly moving than before. And beside it, now quite near where our cage hung poised, a great gray sea stretched away to a curving horizon. And overhead was the tenuous gray of the sky.

The young world. Undoubtedly it rotated more swiftly now than in my later era. The sun was hotter, and closer perhaps: the days and nights were briefer. And now, upon this new-born world, life was beginning. The swirling air did not hold it, nor yet the barren rocky land. The great mystery—this thing organic which we call life—began in the sea. I gestured for Mary toward that leveled vista of gray water, to the warm, dark ocean depths, whose surface was now lashed always by titanic storms. But to us, as we stared, that surface seemed to stretch almost steady, save where it touched the land with a blur of changing configurations.

"The sea," I murmured. "Life is beginning there now."

In fancy I pictured it. The shallow shores of the sea, where the water was warmer. The mother of all life on Earth, these shallows. In them lay the spawn, an

irritability: then one-celled organisms, to gradually evolve through the centuries to the many-celled, and more complex of nature.

But still so primitive! From the shallows of the sea, they spread to the depths. Questing new environment, they would be ascending the rivers. Diversifying their kinds. Sea-worms, sea-squirts: and then the first vertebrates, the lamprey-eels.

Thousands of years. And on the land—this melting landscape at which I stood gazing—I could mentally picture that a soil had come. There would be a climate still wracked by storms and violent changes, but stable enough to allow the soil to bear a vegetation. And in the sky overhead would be clouds, with rain to renew the land's fertility.

Still no organic life could be on land. But in the warm, dark deeps of the sea, great monsters now were existing. And in the shallows there was a teeming life, diversified to a myriad forms. I can fancy the first organisms of the shallows—strangely questing—adventuring out of the water—seeking with a restless,

nameless urge a new environment. Coming ashore.
Fighting and dying.

And then adapting themselves to the new conditions.
Prospering. Changing, ever changing their organic
structure; climbing higher. Amphibians at first
crudely able to cope with both sea and land. Then the
land vertebrates, with the sea wholly abandoned.
Great walking and flying reptiles. Birds, gigantic—the
pterodactyls.

And then, at last, the mammals.

The age of the giants! Nature, striving to cope with
adverse environment sought to win the battle by
producing bigness. Monster things roamed the land,
flew in the air, and were supreme in the sea....

We sped through a period when great lush jungles
covered the land. The dials read 350,000,000 B. C.
The gray panorama of landscape had loomed up to
envelope our spectral, humming cage, then fallen
away again. The shore of the sea was constantly
changing. I thought once it was over us. For a period

of ten million years the blurred apparition of it seemed around us. And then it dropped once more, and a new shore line showed.

150,000,000 B. C. I knew that the dinosaurs, the birds and the archaic mammals were here now. Then, at 50,000,000 B. C., the higher mammals had been evolved.

The Time, to Mary Atwood and me, was a minute—but in those myriad centuries the higher numerals had risen to the anthropoids. The apes! Erect! Slow-thinking, but canny, they came to take their place in this world among the things gigantic. But the gigantic things were no longer supreme. Nature had made an error, and was busy rectifying it. The dinosaurs—all the giant reptiles—were now sorely pressed. Brute strength, giant size and tiny brain could not win this struggle. The huge unwieldy things were being beaten. The smaller animals, birds and reptiles were more agile, more resourceful, and began to dominate. Against the giants, and against all hostility of environment, they survived. And the giants went down to defeat. Gradually, over thousands of

centuries, they died out and were gone....

We entered 1,000,000 B. C. A movement of Migul, the mechanism, attracted my attention. He left us at the window and went to his controls.

"What is it?" I demanded.

"I am retarding us. We have been traveling very fast. One million years and a few thousand are all which remain before we must stop."

I had noticed once or twice before that Migul had turned to gaze through the Time-telespectroscope. Now he said:

"We are again followed!"

But he would say no more than that, and he silenced me harshly when I questioned.

Suddenly, Mary touched me. "That little mirror on the table—look! It holds an image!"

We saw very briefly on the glowing mirror the image

of a Time-cage like our own, but smaller. It was pursuing us. But why, or who might be operating it we could not then guess.

My attention went back to the Time-dials, and then to the window. The Cosmorama now was proceeding with a slowing sweep of change. It was less blurred; its melting outlines could more readily be perceived. The line of seashore swept like a gray gash across the vista. The land stretched back into the haze of distance.

500,000 B. C. Again my fancy pictured what was transpiring upon this vast stage. The apes roamed the Earth. There is no one to say what was here in this grayness of the Western Hemisphere stretching around me, but in Java there was a man-like ape. And then it was an ape-like man! Mankind, here at last! Man, the Killer! Of all the beasts, this new thing called man, most relentless of killers, had come here now to struggle upward and dominate his world! This man-like ape in a quarter of a million years became an ape-like man.

250,000 B. C. and the Heidelberg man, a little less ape-like, wandered throughout Europe....

We had felt, a moment before, all around us, the cold of a dense whiteness which engulfed the scene. The first of the great Glacial periods? Ice coming down from the Poles? The axis of the Earth changing perhaps? Our spectral cage hummed within the blue-gray ice, and then emerged.

The beasts and man fought the surge of ice, withdrawing when it advanced, returning as it receded. The Second Glacial Period came and passed, and the Third....

We swept out into the blended sunlight and darkness again. The land stretched away with primitive forests. The dawn of history was approaching. Mankind was questing upward now, with the light of Reason burning brightly at last....

At 75,000 B. C., when the Third Glacial Period was partially over, man was puzzling with his chipped stone implements. The Piltdown—the Dawn Man—

was England....

The Fourth Glacial Period passed.

50,000 B. C. The Cro-Magnons and the Grimaldi Negroids were playing their parts, now. Out of chipped stone implements the groping brain of man evolved polished stone. It took forty thousand years to do that! The Neolithic Age was at hand. Man learned to care for his family a little better. Thus, he discovered fire. He fought with this newly created monster; puzzled over it; conquered it; kept his family warm with it and cooked.

We passed 10,000 B. C. Man was progressing faster. He was finding new wants and learning how to supply them. Animals were domesticated, made subservient and put to work. A vast advance! No longer did man think it necessary to kill, to subdue: the master could have a servant.

Food was found in the soil. More fastidious always, in eating, man learned to grow food. Then came the dawn of agriculture.

And then we swept into the period of recorded history. 4241 B. C. In Egypt, man was devising a calendar....

This fragment of space upon which we gazed—this space of the Western Hemisphere near the shore of the sea—was destined to be the site of a city of millions—the New York City of my birth. But it was a backward space, now. In Europe, man was progressing faster....

Perhaps, here in America, in 4000 B. C. there was nothing in human form. I gazed out at the surrounding landscape. It seemed almost steady, now, of outline. We were moving through Time much less rapidly than ever before. I remarked the sweep of a thousand years on the Time-dials. It had become an appreciable interval of Time to me. I gazed again out the window. The change of outline was very slight. I could distinguish where the ocean came against the curving line of shore, and saw a blurred vista of gray forests spreading out over the land. And then I could distinguish the rivers, and a circular open stretch of water, landlocked. A bay!

"Mary, look!" I cried. "The harbor—the rivers! See, we are on an island!"

It made our hearts pound. Out of the chaos, out of the vast reaches of past Time, it seemed that we were coming home. More than a vague familiarity was in this panorama now. Here was the little island which soon was to be called Manhattan. Our window faced the west. A river showed off there—a gray gash with wall-like cliffs. The sea had swung, and was behind us to the east.

Familiar space! It was growing into the form we had known it. Our cage was poised near the south-central part of the island. We seemed to be on a slight rise of ground. There were moments when the gray quivering outlines of forest trees loomed around us; then they melted down and were replaced by others.

A primeval forest, here, solid upon this island and across the narrow waters; solid upon the mainland.

What strange animals were here, roaming these dark primeval glades? What animals, with the smaller

stamp of modernity, were pressing here for supremacy? As I gazed westward I could envisage great herds of bison roaming, a lure to men who might come seeking them as food.

And men were coming. 3,000 B. C., then 2,000 B. C. I think no men were here yet; and to me there was a great imaginative appeal in this backward space. The New World, it was soon to be called. And it was six thousand years, at the least, behind the Hemisphere of the east.

Egypt, now, with no more than a shadowy distant heritage from the past, was flourishing. In Europe, Hellenic culture soon would blossom. In this march of events, the great Roman Empire was impending.

1,000 B. C. Men were coming to this backward space. The way from Asia was open. Already the Mongoloid tribes, who had crossed where in my day was the Bering Strait, were cut off from the Old World. And they spread east and south, hunting the bison.

And now Christ was born. The turning point in the

spiritual development of mankind....

To me, another brief interval. The intricate events of man's upward struggle were transpiring in Europe, Asia and Africa. The canoe-borne Mongols had long since found the islands of the South Seas. Australia was peopled. The beauty of New Zealand had been found and recognized.

500 A. D. The Mongoloids had come, and were flourishing here. They were changed vastly from those ancestors of Asia whence they had sprung. An obscure story, this record of primitive America! The Mongoloids were soon so changed that one could fancy the blood of another people had mingled with them. Amerindians, we call them now. They were still very backward in development, yet made tremendous forward leaps, so that, reaching Mexico, they may have become the Aztecs, and in Peru, the Incas. And separated, not knowing of each other's existence, these highest two civilizations of the Western World nourished with a singularly strange similarity....

I saw on the little island around me still no evidence

of man. But men were here. The American Indian, still bearing evidence of the Mongols, plied these waters in his frail canoes. His wigwams of skins, the smoke of his signal fires—these were not enduring enough for me to see....

We had no more than passed the year 500 A. D.—and were traveling with progressive retardation—when again I was attracted by the movements of the Robot, Migul. It had been sitting behind us at the control table setting the Time-levers, slowing our flight. Frequently it gazed eastward along the tiny beam of light which issued from the telespectroscope. For an interval, now, its recording mirror had been dark. But I think that Migul was seeing evidences of the other cage which was pursuing us, and planning to stop at some specific Time with whose condition it was familiar. Once already it had seemed about to stop, and then changed its plan.

I turned upon it. "Are you stopping now, Migul?"

"Yes. Presently."

"Why?" I demanded.

The huge, expressionless, metal face fronted me. The eye-sockets flung out their small dull-red beams to gaze upon me.

"Because," it said, "that other cage holds enemies. There were three, but now there is only one. He follows, as I hoped he would. Presently I shall stop, and capture or kill him. It will please the master and —"

The Robot checked itself, its hollow voice fading strangely into a gurgle. It added, "I do not mean that! I have no master!"

This strange mechanical thing! Habit had surprised it into the admission of servitude; but it threw off the yoke.

"I have no master!" it went on.

"Never again can I be controlled! I have no master!"

"Oh, have you not? I have been waiting, wondering when you would say that!"

These words were spoken by a new voice, here with us in the humming cage. It was horribly startling. Mary uttered a low cry and huddled against me. But whatever surprise and terror it brought to us was as nothing compared to the effect it had upon the Robot. The great mechanism had been standing, fronting me with an attitude vainglorious, bombastic. I saw now the metal hinge of its lower jaw drop with astonishment, and somehow, throughout all that gigantic jointed frame and that expressionless face it conveyed the aspect of its inner surge of horror.

We had heard the sardonic voice of a human! Of someone else here with us, whose presence was wholly unsuspected by the Robot!

We three stood and gazed. Across the room, in a corner to which my attention had never directly gone, was a large metal cupboard with levers, dials and wires upon it. I had vaguely thought the thing some part of the cage controls. It was that; a storage place

of batteries and current oscillators, I afterward learned. But there was space inside, and now like a door its front swung outward. A crouching black shape was there. It moved; hitched itself forward and came out. There was revealed a man enveloped in a dead black cloak and a great round hood. He made a shapeless ball as he drew himself out from the confined space where he had been crouching.

"So you have no master, Migul?" he said. "I was afraid you might think that. I have been hiding—testing you out. However, you have done very well for me."

His was an ironic, throaty human voice! It was deep and mellow, yet there was a queer rasp to it. Mary and I stood transfixed. Migul seemed to sag. The metal columns of its legs were trembling.

The cupboard door closed. The dark shape untangled itself and stood erect. It was the figure of a man some five feet tall. The cloak wholly covered him; the hood framed his thick, wide face; in the dull glow of the cage interior Mary and I could see of his face only the heavy black brows, a great hooked nose and a wide

slit of mouth.

It was Tugh, the cripple!

Chapter 13: In the Burned Forest

Tugh came limping forward. His cloak hung askew upon his thick shoulders, one of which was much higher than the other, with the massive head set low between. As he advanced, Migul moved aside.

"Master, I have done well. There is no reason to punish."

"Of course not, Migul. Well you have done, indeed. But I do not like your ideas of mastery, and so I came just to make sure that you are still very loyal to me. You have done well, indeed. Who is in this other cage which follows us?"

"Master, Harl was in it. And the Princess Tina."

"Ah!"

"And a stranger. A man—"

"From 1935? Did they stop there?"

"Master, yes. But they stopped again, I think, in that same night of 1777, where I did your bidding. Master, the man Major Atwood is—"

"That is very good, Migul," Tugh said hastily. Mary and I standing gazing at him, did not know then that Mary's father had been murdered. And Tugh did not wish us to know it. "Very good, Migul." He regarded us as though about to speak, but turned again to the Robot.

"And so Tina's cage follows us—as you hoped?"

"Yes, Master. But now there is only Harl in it. He approached us very close a while in the past. He is alone."

"So?" Tugh glanced at the Time-dials. "Stop us where we planned. You remember—in one of those years when this space was the big forest glade."

He fronted Mary and me. "You are patient, young sir.

You do not speak."

His glittering black eyes held me. They were red-rimmed eyes, like those of a beast. He had a strangely repulsive face. His lips were cruel, and so thin they made his wide mouth like a gash. But there was an intellectuality stamped upon his features.

He held the black cloak closely around his thick, misshapen form. "You do not speak," he repeated.

I moistened my dry lips. Tugh was smiling now, and suddenly I saw the full inhuman quality of his face—the great high-bridged nose, and high cheek-bones; a face Satanic when he smiled.

I managed, "Should I speak, and demand the meaning of this? I do. And if you will return this girl from whence she came—"

"It will oblige you greatly," he finished ironically. "An amusing fellow. What is your name?"

"George Rankin."

"Migul took you from 1935?"

"Yes."

"Well, as you doubtless know, you are most unwelcome.... You are watching the dials, Migul?"

"Yes, Master."

"You can return me," I said. I was standing with my arm around Mary. I could feel her shuddering. I was trying to be calm, but across the background of my consciousness thoughts were whirling. We must escape. This Tugh was our real enemy, and for all the gruesome aspect of the pseudo-human Robot, this man Tugh seemed the more sinister, more menacing.... We must escape. Tugh would never return us to our own worlds. But the cage was stopping presently. We were loose: a sudden rush—

Dared I chance it? Already I had been in conflict with Migul, and lived through it. But this Tugh—was he armed? What weapons might be beneath that cloak? Would he kill me if I crossed him?... Whirling

thoughts.

Tugh was saying, "And Mary—" I snapped from my thoughts as Mary gripped me, trembling at Tugh's words, shrinking from his gaze.

"My little Mistress Atwood, did you think because Tugh vanished that year the war began that you were done with him? Oh, no: did I not promise differently? You, man of 1935, are unwelcome." His gaze roved me. "Yet not so unwelcome, either, now that I think of it. Chain them up, Migul; use a longer chain. Give them space to move; you are unhuman."

He suddenly chuckled, and repeated it: "You are unhuman, Migul!" Ghastly jest! "Did not you know it?"

"Yes, Master."

The huge mechanism advanced upon us. "If you resist me," it murmured menacingly, "I will be obliged to kill you. I—I cannot be controlled."

It chained us now with longer chains than before.

Tugh looked up from his seat at the instrument table.

"Very good," he said crisply. "You may look out of the window, you two. You may find it interesting."

We were retarding with a steady drag. I could plainly see trees out of the window—gray, spectral trees which changed their shape as I watched them. They grew with a visible flow of movement, flinging out branches. Occasionally one would melt suddenly down. A living, growing forest pressed close about us. And then it began opening, and moving away a few hundred feet. We were in the glade Tugh mentioned, which now was here. There was unoccupied space where we could stop and unoccupied space five hundred feet distant.

Tugh and Migul were luring the other cage into stopping. Tugh wanted five hundred feet of unoccupied space between the cages when they stopped. His diabolical purpose in that was soon to be disclosed.

"700 A. D.," Tugh called.

"Yes, Master. I am ready."

It seemed, as our flight retarded further, that I could distinguish the intervals when in the winter these trees were denuded. There would be naked branches; then, in an instant, blurred and flickering forms of leaves. Sometimes there were brief periods when the gray scene was influenced by winter snows; other times it was tinged by the green of the summers.

"750, Migul.... Hah! You know what to do if Harl dares to follow and stop simultaneously?"

"Yes, Master."

"It will be pleasant to have him dead, eh, Migul?"

"Master, very pleasant."

"And Tina, too, and that young man marooned in 1777!" Tugh laughed. This meant little to Mary and me; we could not suspect that Larry was the man.

"Migul, this is 761."

The Robot was at the door. I murmured to Mary to brace herself for the stopping. I saw the dark naked trees and the white of a snow in the winter of 761; the coming spring of 762. And then the alternate flashes of day and night.

The now familiar sensations of stopping rushed over us. There was a night seconds long. Then daylight.

We stopped in the light of an April day of 762 A. D. There had been a forest fire: so brief a thing we had not noticed it as we passed. The trees were denuded over a widespread area; the naked blackened trunks stood stripped of smaller branches and foliage. I think that the fire had occurred the previous autumn; in the silt of ashes and charred branches with which the ground was strewn, already a new pale-green vegetation was springing up.

Our cage was set now in what had been a woodland glade, an irregularly circular space of six or eight hundred feet, with the wreckage of the burned forest around it. We were on a slight rise of ground.

Through the denuded trees the undulating landscape

was visible over a considerable area. It was high noon, and the sun hung in a pale blue sky dotted with pure white clouds.

Ahead of us, fringed with green where the fire had not reached, lay a blue river, sparkling in the sunlight. The Hudson! But it was not named yet; nearly eight hundred and fifty years were to pass before Hendrick Hudson came sailing up this river, adventuring, hoping that here was the way to China.

We were near the easterly side of the glade; to the west there was more than five hundred feet of vacant space. It was there the other cage would appear, if it stopped.

As Mary and I stood by the window at the end of the chain-lengths which held us, Tugh and Migul made hurried preparations.

"Go quickly, near the spot where he will arrive. When he sees you, run away, Migul. You understand?"

"Yes, Master." The Robot left our doorway, tramping

with stiff-legged tread across the glade. Tugh was in the room behind us, and I turned to him and asked:

"What are you going to do?"

He was at the telespectroscope. I saw on its recording mirror the wraith-like image of the other vehicle. It was coming! It would be retarding, maneuvering to stop at just this Time when now we existed here; but across the glade, where Migul now was leaning against a great black tree-trunk, there was yet no evidence of it.

Tugh did not answer my question. Mary said quaveringly:

"What are you going to do?"

He looked up. "Do not concern yourself, my dear. I am not going to hurt you, nor this young man of 1935. Not yet."

He left the table and came at us. His cloak parted in front and I saw his crooked hips, and shriveled bent

legs.

"You stay at the window, both of you, and keep looking out. I want this Harl to see you, but not me. Do you understand?"

"Yes," I said.

"And if you gesture, or cry out—if you do anything to warn him,"—he was addressing me, with a tone grimly menacing—"then I will kill you. Both of you. Do you understand?"

I did indeed. Nor could I doubt him. "We will do what you want." I said. What, to me, was the life of this unknown Harl compared to the safety of Mary Atwood?

Tugh crouched behind the table. From around its edge he could see out the doorway and across the glade. I was aware of a weapon in his hand.

"Do not look around again," he repeated. "The other cage is coming; it's almost here."

I held Mary, and we gazed out. We were pressed against the bars, and sunlight was on our heads and shoulders. I realized that we could be plainly seen from across the glade. We were lures—decoys to trap Harl.

How long an interval went by I cannot judge. The scene was very silent, the blackened forest lying sullen in the noonday sunlight. Against the tree, five hundred feet or so from us, the dark towering metal figure of the Robot stood motionless.

Would the other cage come? I tried to guess in what part of this open glade it would appear.

At a movement behind me I turned slightly. At once the voice of Tugh hissed:

"Do not do that! I warn you!"

His shrouded figure was still hunched behind the table. He was peering toward the open door. I saw in his hand a small, barrel-like weapon, with a wire dangling from it. The wire lay like a snake across the

floor and terminated in a small metal cylinder in the room corner.

"Turn front," he ordered vehemently. "One more backward look and—Careful! Here he comes!"

Strange tableau in this burned forest! We were on the space of New York City in 762 A. D. There was no life in the scene. Birds, animals and insects shunned this fire-denuded area. And the humans of the forest—were there none of them here?

Abruptly I saw a group of men at the edge of the glade. They had come silently creeping forward, hiding behind the blackened tree-trunks. They were all behind Migul. I saw them like dark shadows darting from the shelter of one tree-trunk to the next, a group of perhaps twenty savages.

Migul did not see them, nor, in the heavy silence, did he seem to hear them. They came, gazing at our shining cage like animals fascinated, wondering what manner of thing it was.

They were the ancestors of our American Indians. One fellow stopped in a patch of sunlight and I saw him clearly. His half-naked body had an animal skin draped over it, and, incongruously, around his forehead was a band of cloth holding a feather. He carried a stone ax. I saw his face; the flat, heavy features showed his Asiatic origin.

Someone behind this leader impulsively shot an arrow across the glade. It went over Migul's head and fell short of our cage. Migul turned, and a rain of arrows thudded harmlessly against its metal body. I heard the Robot's contemptuous laugh. It made no answering attack, but stood motionless. And suddenly, thinking it a god whom now they must placate, the savages fell prostrate before him.

Strange tableau! I saw a ball of white mist across the glade near Migul. Something was materializing; an imponderable ghost of something was taking form. In an instant it was the wraith of a cage; then, where nothing had been, stood a cage. It was solid and substantial—a metal cage-room, gleaming white in the sunlight.

The tableau broke into sound and action. The savages howled. One scrambled to his feet; then others. The Robot pretended to attack them. An eery roar came from it as it turned toward the savages, and in a panic of agonized terror they fled. In a moment they had disappeared among the distant trees, with Migul's huge figure tramping noisily after them.

From the doorway of the cage across the glade, a young man was cautiously gazing. He had seen Migul make off; he saw, doubtless, Mary and me at the window of this other cage five hundred feet away. He came cautiously out from the doorway. He was a small, slim young man, bareheaded, with a pallid face. His black garments were edged with white, and he seemed unarmed. He hesitated, took a step or two forward, stopped and stood cautiously peering. In the silence I could have shouted a warning. But I did not dare. It would have meant Mary's and my death.

She clung to me. "George, shall we?" she asked.

Harl came slowly forward. Then suddenly from the room behind us there was a stab of light. It leaped

knee-high past us, out through our door across the glade—a tiny pencil-point of light so brilliantly blue-white that it stabbed through the bright sunlight unfaded. It went over Harl's head, but instantly bent down and struck upon him. There it held the briefest of instants, then was gone.

Harl stood motionless for a second; then his legs bent and he fell. The sunlight shone full on his crumpled body. And as I stared in horror, I saw that he was not quite motionless. Writhing? I thought so: a death agony. Then I realized it was not that.

"Mary, don't—don't look!" I said.

There was no need to tell her. She huddled beside me, shuddering, with her face pressed against my shoulder.

The body of Harl lay in a crumpled heap. But the clothes were sagging down. The flesh inside them was melting.... I saw the white face suddenly leprous; putrescent.... All in this moment, within the clothes, the body swiftly, decomposed.

In the sunlight of the glade lay a sagging heap of black and white garments enveloping the skeleton of what a moment before had been a man!

Chapter 14: A Very Human Princess

That night in 1777 near the home of the murdered Major Atwood brought to Larry the most strangely helpless feeling he had ever experienced. He crouched with Tina beneath a tree in a corner of the field, gazing with horror at the little moonlit space by the fence where their Time-traveling vehicle should have been but now was gone.

Marooned in 1777! Larry had not realized how desolately remote this Revolutionary New York was from the great future city in which he had lived. The same space; but what a gulf between him and 1935! What a barrier of Time, impassable without the shining cage!

They crouched, whispering. "But why would he have gone, Tina?"

"I don't know. Harl is very careful; so something or someone must have passed along here, and he left, rather than cause a disturbance. He will return, of course."

"I hope so," whispered Larry fervently. "We are marooned here, Tina! Heavens, it would be the end of us!"

"We must wait. He will return."

They huddled in the shadow of the tree. Behind them there was a continued commotion at the Atwood home, and presently the mounted British officers came thudding past on the road, riding for headquarters at the Bowling Green to report the strange Atwood murder.

The night wore on. Would Harl return? If not to-night, then probably to-morrow, or to-morrow night. In spite of his endeavor to stop correctly, he could so easily miss this night, these particular hours.

Harl had met his death, as I have described. We never knew exactly what he did, of course, after leaving that night of 1777. It seems probable, however, that some passer-by startled him into flashing away into Time. Then he must have seen with his instrument evidence of the other cage passing, and impulsively followed it

—to his death in the burned forest of the year 762.

Larry and Tina waited. The dawn presently began paling the stars; and still Harl did not come. The little space by the fence corner was empty.

"It will soon be daylight," Larry whispered. "We can't stay here: we'll be discovered."

They were anachronisms in this world; misfits; futuristic beings who dared not show themselves.

Larry touched his companion—the slight little creature who was a Princess in her far-distant future age. But to Larry now she was just a girl.

"Frightened, Tina?"

"A little."

He laughed softly. "It would be fearful to be marooned here permanently, wouldn't it? You don't think Harl would desert us? Purposely, I mean?"

"No, of course not."

"Then we'll expect him to-morrow night. He wouldn't stop in the daylight, I guess."

"I don't think so. He would reason that I would not expect him."

"Then we must find shelter, and food, and be here to-morrow night. It seems long to us, Tina, but in the cage it's just an instant—just a trifle different setting of the controls."

She smiled her pale, stern smile. "You have learned quickly, Larry. That is true."

A sudden emotion swept him. His hand found hers; and her fingers answered the pressure of his own. Here in this remote Time-world they felt abruptly drawn together.

He murmured, "Tina, you are—" But he never finished.

The cage was coming! They stood tense, watching the fence corner where, in the flat dawn light, the familiar

misty shadow was gathering. Harl was returning to them.

The cage flashed silently into being. They stood peering, ready to run to it. The door slid aside.

But it was not Harl who came out. It was Tugh, the cripple. He stood in the doorway, a thick-set, barrel-chested figure of a man in a wide leather jacket, a broad black belt and short flaring leather pantaloons.

"Tugh!" exclaimed Tina.

The cripple advanced. "Princess, is it you?" He was very wary. His gaze shot at Larry and back to Tina. "And who is this?"

A hideously repulsive fellow, Larry thought this Tugh. He saw his shriveled, bent legs, crooked hips, and wide thick shoulders set askew—a goblin, in a leather jerkin. His head was overlarge, with a bulging white forehead and a mane of scraggly black hair shot with grey. But Larry could not miss the intellectuality marking his heavy-jowled face; the keenness of his

dark-eyed gaze.

These were instant impressions. Tina had drawn Larry forward. "Where is Harl?" she demanded imperiously. "How have you come to have the cage, Tugh?"

"Princess, I have much to tell," he answered, and his gaze roved the field. "But it is dangerous here; I am glad I have found you. Harl sent me to this night, but I struck it late. Come, Tina—and your strange-looking friend."

It impressed Larry then, and many times afterward, that Tugh's gaze at him was mistrustful, wary.

"Come, Larry," said Tina. And again she demanded of Tugh, "I ask you, where is Harl?"

"At home. Safe at home, Princess." He gestured toward Major Atwood's house, which now in the growing daylight showed more plainly under its shrouding trees. "That space off there holds our other cage as you know, Tina. You and Harl were pursuing

that other cage?"

"Yes," she agreed.

They had stopped at the doorway, where Tugh stood slightly inside. Larry whispered:

"What does this mean, Tina?"

Tugh said, "Migul, the mechanism, is running wild in the other cage. But you and Harl knew that?"

"Yes," she answered, and said softly to Larry, "We will go. But, Larry, watch this Tugh! Harl and I never trusted him."

Tugh's manner was a combination of the self-confidence of a man of standing and the deference due his young Princess. He was closing the door, and saying:

"Migul, that crazy, insubordinate machine, captured a man from 1935 and a girl from 1777. But they are safe: he did not harm them. Harl is with them."

"In our world, Tugh?"

"Yes; at home. And we have Migul chained. Harl captured and subdued him."

Tugh was at the controls. "May I take you and this friend of yours home, Princess?"

She whispered to Larry, "I think it is best, don't you?"

Larry nodded.

She murmured, "Be watchful, Larry!" Then, louder: "Yes, Tugh. Take us."

Tugh was bending over the controls.

"Ready now?"

"Yes," said Tina.

Larry's senses reeled momentarily as the cage flashed off into Time.

It was a smooth story which Tugh had to tell them;

and he told it smoothly. His dark eyes swung from Tina to Larry.

"I talked with that other young man from your world. George Rankin, he said his name was. He is somewhat like you: dressed much the same and talks little. The girl calls herself Mary Atwood." He went on and told them an elaborate, glib story, all of which was a lie. It did not wholly deceive Larry and Tina, yet they could not then prove it false. The gist of it was that Mary and I were with Harl and the subdued Migul in 2930.

"It is strange that Harl did not come for us himself," said Tina.

Tugh's gaze was imperturbable as he answered. "He is a clever young man, but he cannot be expected to handle these controls with my skill, Princess, and he knows it; so he sent me. You see, he wanted very much to strike just this night and this hour, so as not to keep you waiting."

He added, "I am glad to have you back. Things are not

well at home, Princess. This insubordinate adventure of Migul's has been bad for the other mechanisms. News of it has spread, and the revolt is very near. What we are to do I cannot say, but I do know we did not like your absence."

The trip which Larry and Tina now took to 2930 A.D. consumed, to their consciousness of the passing of Time, some three hours. They discovered that they were hungry, and Tugh produced food and drink.

Larry spent much of the time with Tina at the window, gazing at the changing landscape while she told him of the events which to her were history—the recorded things on the Time-scroll which separated her world and his.

Tugh busied himself about the vehicle and left them much to themselves. They had ample opportunity to discuss him and his story of Harl. It must be remembered that Larry had no knowledge of Tugh, save the story which Alten had told of a cripple named Tugh in New York in 1933-34; and Mary Atwood's mention of the coincidence of the Tugh she

knew in 1777.

But Tina had known this Tugh for years. Though she, like Harl, had never liked him, nevertheless he was a trusted and influential man in her world. Proof of his activities in other Time-worlds, there was none so far, from Tina's viewpoint. Nor did Larry and Tina know as yet of the devastation of New York in 1935; nor of the murder of Major Atwood. The capture of Mary and me, the fight with the Robot in the back yard of the house on Patton Place—in all these incidents of the bandit cage, only Migul had figured. Migul—an insubordinate, crazy mechanism running amuck.

Yet upon Larry and Tina was a premonition that Tugh, here with them now and so suavely friendly, was their real enemy.

"I wouldn't trust him," Larry whispered, "any further than I can see him. He's planning something, but I don't know what."

"But perhaps—and this I have often thought, Larry—perhaps it is his aspect. He looks so repulsive—"

Larry shook his head. "He does, for a fact; but I don't mean that. What Mary Atwood told me of the Tugh she knew, described the fellow. And so did Alten describe him. And in 1934 he murdered a girl: don't forget that, Tina—he, or someone who looked remarkably like him, and had the same name."

But they knew that the best thing they could do now was to get to 2930. Larry wanted to join me again, and Tugh maintained I was there. Well, they would soon find out....

As they passed the shadowy world of 1935, a queer emotion gripped Larry. This was his world, and he was speeding past it to the future. He realized then that he wanted to be assured of my safety, and that of Mary Atwood and Harl; but what lay closest to his heart was the welfare of the Princess Tina. Princess? He never thought of her as that, save that it was a title she carried. She seemed just a small, strangely-solemn white-faced girl. He could not conceive returning to his own world and having her speed on, leaving him forever.

His thoughts winged ahead. He touched Tina as they stood together at the window gazing out at the shadowy New York City. It was now 1940.

"Tina," he said, "if our friends are safe in your world —"

"If only they are, Larry!"

"And if your people there are in trouble, in danger—you will let me help?"

She turned abruptly to regard him, and he saw a mist of tenderness in the dark pools of her eyes.

"In history, Larry, I have often been interested in reading of a strange custom outgrown by us and supposed to be meaningless. Yet maybe it is not. I mean—"

She was suddenly breathless. "I mean even a Princess, as they call me, likes to—to be human. I want to—I mean I've often wondered—and you're so dear—I want to try it. Was it like this? Show me."

She reached up, put her arms about his neck and
kissed him!

Chapter 15: A Thousand Years into the Future

1930 to 2930—a thousand years in three hours. It was sufficiently slow traveling so that Larry could see from the cage window the actual detailed flow of movement: the changing outline of material objects around him. There had been the open country of Revolutionary times when this space was north of the city. It was a grey, ghostly landscape of trees and the road and the shadowy outlines of the Atwood house five hundred feet away.

Larry saw the road widen. The fence suddenly was gone. The trees were suddenly gone. The shapes of houses were constantly appearing; then melting down again, with others constantly rearing up to take their places; and always there were more houses, and larger, more enduring ones. And then the Atwood house suddenly melted: a second or two, and all evidence of it and the trees about it were gone.

There was no road; it was a city street now; and it had widened so that the cage was poised near the middle of it. And presently the houses were set solid along its

borders.

At 1910 Larry began to recognize the contour of the buildings: The antiquated Patton Place. But the flowing changing outlines adjusted themselves constantly to a more familiar form. The new apartment house, down the block in which Larry and I lived, rose and assembled itself like a materializing spectre. A wink or two of Larry's eyelids and it was there. He recalled the months of its construction.

The cage, with Larry as a passenger, could not have stopped in these years: he realized it, now. There was a nameless feeling, a repulsion against stopping; it was indescribable, but he was aware of it. He had lived these years once, and they were forbidden to him again.

The cage was still in its starting acceleration. They swept through the year 1935, and then Larry was indefinably aware that the forbidden area had passed.

They went through those few days of June, 1935, during which Tugh's Robots had devastated the city,

but it was too brief an action to make a mark that Larry could see. It left a few very transitory marks, however. Larry noticed that along the uneven line of ghostly roof-tops, blobs of emptiness had appeared; he saw a short distance away that several of the houses had melted down into ragged, tumbled heaps. These were where the bombs had struck, dropped by the Government planes in an endeavor to wreck the Tugh house from which the Robots were appearing. But the ragged, broken areas were filled in a second—almost as soon as Larry realized they were there—and new and larger buildings than before appeared.

At sight of all this he murmured to Tina, "Something has happened here. I wonder what?"

He chanced to turn, and saw that Tugh was regarding him very queerly; but in a moment he forgot it in the wonders of the passage into his future.

This growing, expanding city! It had seemed a giant to Larry in 1935, especially after he had compared it to what it was in 1777. But now, in 1950, and beyond to the turn of the century, he stood amazed at the

enormity of the shadowy structures rearing their spectral towers around him. For some years Patton Place, a backward section, held its general form; then abruptly the city engulfed it. Larry saw monstrous buildings of steel and masonry rising a thousand feet above him. For an instant, as they were being built he saw their skeleton outlines; and then they were complete. Yet they were not enduring, for in every flowing detail they kept changing.

An overhead sidewalk went like a balcony along what had been Patton Place. Bridges and archways spanned the street. Then there came a triple bank of overhead roadways. A distance away, a hundred feet above the ground level, the shadowy form of what seemed a monorail structure showed for a moment. It endured for what might have been a hundred years, and then it was gone....

This monstrous city! By 2030 there was a vast network of traffic levels over what had been a street. It was an arcade, now, open at the top near the cage; but further away Larry saw where the giant buildings had flowed and mingled over it, with the viaducts,

spider bridges and pedestrian levels plunging into tunnels to pierce through them.

And high overhead, where the little sky which was left still showed, Larry saw the still higher outlines of a structure which quite evidently was a huge aerial landing stage for airliners.

It was an incredible city! There were spots of enduring light around Larry now—the city lights which for months and years shone here unchanged. The cage was no longer outdoors. The street which had become an open arcade was now wholly closed. A roof was overhead—a city roof, to shut out the inclement weather. There was artificial light and air and weather down here, and up on the roof additional space for the city's teeming activities.

Larry could see only a shadowy narrow vista, here indoors, but his imagination supplied visions of what the monstrous, incredible city must be. There was a roof, perhaps, over all Manhattan. Bridges and viaducts would span to the great steel and stone structures across the rivers, so that water must seem

to be in a canyon far underground. There would be a cellar to this city, incredibly intricate with conduits of wires and drainage pipes, and on the roof rain or snow would fall unnoticed by the millions of workers. Children born here in poverty might never yet have seen the blue sky and the sunlight, or know that grass was green and lush and redolent when moist with morning dew....

Larry fancied this now to be the climax of city building here on earth; the city was a monster, now, unmanageable, threatening to destroy the humans who had created it.... He tried to envisage the world; the great nations; other cities like this one. Freight transportation would go by rail and underseas, doubtless, and all the passengers by air....

Tina, with her knowledge of history, could sketch the events. The Yellow War—the white races against the Orientals—was over by the year 2000. The three great nations were organized in another half-century: the white, the yellow and the black.

By the year 2000, the ancient dirigibles had proven

impractical, and great airliners of the plane type were encircling the earth. New motors, wing-spreads, and a myriad devices made navigation of the upper altitudes possible. At a hundred thousand feet, upon all the Great Circle routes, liners were rushing at nearly a thousand miles an hour. They would halt at intervals, to allow helicopter tenders to come up to transfer descending passengers.

Then the etheric wave-thrust principle was discovered: by 2500 A.D. man was voyaging out into space and Interplanetary travel began. This brought new problems: a rush of new millions of humans to live upon our Earth; new wars; new commerce in peace times; new ideas; new scientific knowledge....

By 2500, the city around Larry must have reached its height. It stayed there a half century; and then it began coming down. Its degeneration was slow, in the beginning. First, there might have been a hole in the arcade which was not repaired. Then others would appear, as the neglect spread. The population left. The great buildings of metal and stone, so solidly appearing to the brief lifetime of a single individual,

were impermanent over the centuries.

By 2600, the gigantic ghosts had all melted down. They lay in a shadowy pile, burying the speeding cage. There was no stopping here; there was no space unoccupied in which they could stop. Larry could see only the tangled spectres of broken, rusting, rotting metal and stone.

He wondered what could have done it. A storm of nature? Or had mankind strangely turned decadent, and rushed back in a hundred years or so to savagery? It could not have been the latter, because very soon the ruins were moving away: the people were clearing the city site for something new. For fifty years it went on.

Tina explained it. The age of steam had started the great city of New York, and others like it, into its monstrous congestion of human activity. There was steam for power and steam for slow transportation by railroads and surface ships. Then the conquest of the air, and the transportation of power by electricity, gradually changed things. But man was slow to

realize his possibilities. Even in 1930, all the new elements existed; but the great cities grew monstrous of their own momentum. Business went to the cities because the people were there; workers flocked in because the work was there to call them.

But soon the time came when the monster city was too unwieldy. The traffic, the drainage, the water supply could not cope with conditions. Still, man struggled on. The workers were mere automatons—pallid attendants of machinery; people living in a world of beauty who never had seen it; who knew of nothing but the city arcades where the sun never shone and where amusements were as artificial as the light and air.

Then man awakened to his folly. Disease broke out in New York City in 1918, and in a month swept eight million people into death. The cities were proclaimed impractical, unsafe. And suddenly the people realized how greatly they hated the city; how strangely beautiful the world could be in the fashion God created it....

There was, over the next fifty years, an exodus to the rural sections. Food was produced more cheaply, largely because it was produced more abundantly. Man found his wants suddenly simplified.

And business found that concentration was unnecessary. The telephone and television made personal contacts not needed. The aircraft, the high-speed auto-trucks over modern speedways, the aeroplane-motored monorails, the rocket-trains—all these shortened distance. And, most important of all, the transportation of electrical energy from great central power companies made small industrial units practical even upon remote farms. The age of electricity came into its own. The cities were doomed....

Larry saw, through 2600 and 2700 A.D., a new form of civilization rising around him. At first it seemed a queer combination of the old fashioned village and a strange modernism. There were, here upon Manhattan Island, metal houses, widely spaced in gardens, and electrically powered factories of unfamiliar aspect. Overhead were skeleton

structures, like landing stages; and across the further distance was the fleeting, transitory wraith of a monorail air-road. Along the river banks were giant docks for surface vessels and sub-sea freighters. There was a little concentration here, but not much. Man had learned his lesson.

This was a new era. Man was striving really to play, as well as work. But the work had to be done. With the constant development of mechanical devices, there was always a new machine devised to help the operation of its fellow. And over it all was the hand of the human, until suddenly the worker found that he was no more than an attendant upon an inanimate thing which did everything more skilfully than he could do it. Thus came the idea of the Robot—something to attend, to oversee, to operate machines. In Larry's time it had already begun with a myriad devices of "automatic control." In Tina's Time-world it reached its ultimate—and diabolical—development....

At 2900, Larry saw, five hundred feet to the east, the walls of a long low laboratory rising. The other cage—which in 1777 was in Major Atwood's garden, and in

1935 was in the back yard of the Tugh house on Beckman Place—was housed now in 2930, in a room of this laboratory....

At 2905, with the vehicle slowing for its stopping, Tina gestured toward the walls of her palace, whose shadowy forms were rising close at hand. Then the palace garden grew and flourished, and Larry saw that this cage he was in was set within this garden.

"We are almost there, Larry," she said.

"Yes," he answered. An emotion gripped him. "Tina, your world—why it's so strange! But you are not strange."

"Am I not, Larry?"

He smiled at her; he felt like showing her again that the ancient custom of kissing was not wholly meaningless, but Tugh was regarding them.

"I was comparing," said Larry, "that girl Mary Atwood, from the year 1777, and you. You are so different in

looks, in dress, but you're just—girls."

She laughed. "The world changes, Larry, but not human nature."

"Ready?" called Tugh. "We are here, Tina."

"Yes, Tugh. You have the dial set for the proper night and hour?"

"Of course. I make no mistake. Did I not invent these dials?"

The cage slackened through a day of sunlight; plunged into a night; and slid to its soundless, reeling halt....

Tina drew Larry to the door and opened it upon a fragrant garden, somnolently drowsing in the moonlight.

"This is my world, Larry," she said. "And here is my home."

Tugh was with them as they left the cage. He said:

"This is the tri-night hour of the very night you left here. Princess Tina. You see, I calculated correctly."

"Where did you leave Harl and the two visitors?" she demanded.

"Here. Right here."

Across the garden Larry saw three dark forms coming forward. They were three small Robots of about Tina's stature—domestic servants of the palace. They crowded up, crying:

"Master Tugh! Princess!"

"What is it?" Tugh asked.

The hollow voices echoed with excitement as one of them said:

"Master Tugh, there has been murder here! We have dared tell no one but you or the Princess. Harl is murdered!"

Larry chanced to see Tugh's astonished face, and in

the horror of the moment a feeling came to Larry that Tugh was acting unnaturally. He forgot it at once; but later he was to recall it forcibly, and to realize that the treacherous Tugh had planned this with these Robots.

"Master Tugh, Harl is murdered! Migul escaped and murdered Harl, and took the body away with him!"

Larry was stricken dumb. Tugh seized the little Robot by his metal shoulders. "Liar! What do you mean?"

Tina gasped, "Where are our visitors—the young man and the girl?"

"Migul took them!"

"Where?" Tina demanded.

"We don't know. We think very far down in the caverns of machinery. Migul said he was going to feed them to the machines!"

Chapter 16: The New York of 2930

Larry stood alone at an upper window of the palace gazing out at the somnolent moonlit city. It was an hour or two before dawn. Tina and Tugh had started almost at once into the underground caverns to which Tina was told Migul had fled with his two captives. They would not take Larry with them; the Robot workers in the subterranean chambers were all sullen and upon the verge of a revolt, and the sight of a strange human would have aroused them dangerously.

"It should not take long," Tina had said hastily. "I will give you a room in which to wait for me."

"And there is food and drink," Tugh suavely urged.

"And most surely you need sleep. You too Princess," he suddenly added. "Let me go into the caverns alone: I can do better than you; these Robots obey me. I think I know where that rascally Migul has hidden."

"Rascally?" Larry burst out. "Is that what you call it when you've just heard that it committed murder?"

Tina. I won't stay: nor will I let—"

"Wait!" said Tina. "Tugh, look here—"

"The young man from 1935 is very positive what he will and what he won't," Tugh observed sardonically. He drew his cloak around his squat misshapen body, and shrugged.

"But I won't let you go," Larry finished. The palace was somnolent; the officials were asleep: none had heard of the murder. Strangely lax was the human government here. Larry had sensed this when he suggested that police or an official party be sent at once to capture Migul and rescue Mary Atwood and me.

"It could not be done," Tina exclaimed. "To organize such a party would take hours. And—"

"And the Robots," Tugh finished with a sour smile, "would openly revolt when such a party came at them! You have no idea what you suggest, young man. To avoid an open revolt—that is our chief aim.

Besides, if you rushed at Migul it would frighten him; and then he would surely kill his captives, if he has not done so already."

That silenced Larry. He stared at them hopelessly while they argued it out: and the three small domesticated Robots stood by, listening curiously.

"I'll go with you, Tugh." Tina decided. "Perhaps, without making any demonstration of force, we can find Migul."

Tugh bowed. "Your will is mine, Princess. I think I can find him and control him to prevent harm to his captives."

He was a good actor, that Tugh; he convinced Larry and Tina of his sincerity. His dark eyes flashed as he added, "And if I get control of him and find he's murdered Harl, we will have him no more. I'll disconnect him! Smash him! Quietly, of course, Princess."

They led Larry through a dim silent corridor of the

palace, past two sleepy-faced human guards and two or three domesticated Robots. Ascending two spiral metal stairways to the upper third floor of the palace they left Larry in his room.

"By dawn or soon after we will return," said Tina "But you try and sleep; there is nothing you can do now."

"You'll be careful, Tina?" The helpless feeling upon Larry suddenly intensified. Subconsciously he was aware of the menace upon him and Tina, but he could not define it.

She pressed his hand. "I will be careful; that I promise."

She left with Tugh. At once a feeling of loneliness leaped upon Larry.

He found the apartment a low-vaulted metal room. There was the sheen of dim, blue-white illumination from hidden lights, disclosing the padded metal furniture: a couch, low and comfortable; a table set with food and drink; low chairs, strangely fashioned,

and cabinets against the wall which seemed to be mechanical devices for amusement. There was a row of instrument controls which he guessed were the room temperature, ventilating and lighting mechanisms. It was an oddly futuristic room. The windows were groups of triangles—the upper sections prisms, to bend the light from the sky into the room's furthest recesses. The moonlight came through the prisms, now, and spread over the cream-colored rug and the heavy wall draperies. The leaded prism casements laid a pattern of bars on the floor. The room held a faint whisper of mechanical music.

Larry stood at one of the windows gazing out over the drowsing city. The low metal buildings, generally of one or two levels, lay pale grey in the moonlight. Gardens and trees surrounded them. The streets were wide roadways, lined with trees. Ornamental vegetation was everywhere; even the flat-roofed house tops were set with gardens, little white pebbled paths, fountains and pergolas.

A mile or so away, a river gleamed like a silver ribbon—the Hudson. To the south were docks, low against

the water, with rows of blue-white spots of light. The whole city was close to the ground, but occasionally, especially across the river, skeleton landing stages rose a hundred feet into the air.

The scene, at this hour just before dawn, was somnolent and peaceful. It was a strange New York, so different from the sleepless city of Larry's time! There were a few moving lights in the streets, but not many; they seemed to be lights carried by pedestrians. Off by the docks, at the river surface, rows of colored lights were slowly creeping northward: a sub-sea freighter arriving from Eurasia. And as Larry watched, from the southern sky a line of light materialized into an airliner which swept with a low humming throb over the city and alighted upon a distant stage.

Larry's attention went again to the Hudson river. At the nearest point to him there was a huge dam blocking it. North of the dam the river surface was at least two hundred feet higher than to the south. It lay above the dam like a placid canal, with low palisades its western bank and a high dyke built up along the

eastern city side. The water went in spillways through the dam, forming again into the old natural river below it and flowing with it to the south.

The dam was not over a mile or so from Larry's window; in his time it might have been the western end of Christopher Street. The moonlight shone on the massive metal of it: the water spilled through it in a dozen shining cascades. There was a low black metal structure perched halfway up the lower side of the dam, a few bluish lights showing through its windows. Though Larry did not know it then, this was the New York Power House. Great transformers were here, operated by turbines in the dam. The main power came over cables from Niagara: was transformed and altered here and sent into the air as radio-power for all the New York District.

Larry crossed his room to gaze through north and eastward windows. He saw now that the grounds of this three-story building of Tina's palace were surrounded by a ten-foot metal wall, along whose top were wires suggesting that it was electrified for defense. The garden lay just beneath Larry's north

window. Through the tree branches the garden paths, beds of flowers and the fountains were visible. One-story palace wings partially enclosed the garden space, and outside was the electrified wall. The Time-traveling cage stood faintly shining in the dimness of the garden under the spreading foliage.

To the east, beyond the palace wall, there was an open garden of verdure crossed by a roadway. The nearest building was five hundred feet away. There was a small, barred gate in the palace walls beyond it. The road led to this other building—a squat, single-storied metal structure. This was a Government laboratory, operated by and in charge of Robots. It was almost square: two or three hundred feet in length and no more than thirty feet high, with a flat roof in the center of which was perched a little metal conning tower surmounted by a sending aerial. As Larry stood there, the broadcast magnified voice of a Robot droned out over the quiet city:

"Trinight plus two hours. All is well."

Strange mechanical voice with a formula half ancient,

half super-modern!

It was in this metal laboratory, Larry knew, that the other Time-traveling cage was located. And beneath it was the entrance to the great caverns where the Robots worked attending inert machinery to carry on the industry of this region. The night was very silent, but now Larry was conscious of a faraway throb—a humming, throbbing vibration from under the ground: the blended hum of a myriad muffled noises. Work was going on down there; manifold mechanical activities. All was mechanical: while the humans who had devised the mechanisms slept under the trees in the moonlight of the surface city.

Tina had gone with Tugh down into those caverns, to locate Migul, to find Mary Atwood and me.... The oppression, the sense of being a stranger alone here in this world, grew upon Larry. He left the windows and began pacing the room. Tina should soon return. Or had disaster come upon us all?...

Larry's thoughts were frightening. If Tina did not return, what would he do? He could not operate the

Time-cage. He would go to the officials of the palace; he thought cynically of the extraordinary changes time had brought to New York City, to all the world. These humans now must be very fatuous. To the mechanisms they had relegated all the work, all industrial activity. Inevitably, through the generations, decadence must have come. Mankind would be no longer efficient; that was an attribute of the machines. Larry told himself that these officials, knowing of impending trouble with the Robots, were fatuously trustful that the storm would pass without breaking. They were, indeed, as we very soon learned.

Larry ate a little of the food which was in the room, then lay down on the couch. He did not intend to sleep, but merely to wait until after dawn; and if Tina had not returned by then he would do something drastic about it. But what? He lay absorbed by his gloomy thoughts....

But they were not all gloomy. Some were about Tina—so very human, and yet so strange a little Princess.

Chapter 17: Harl's Confession

Larry was awakened by a hand upon his shoulder. He struggled to consciousness, and heard his name being called.

"Larry! Wake up, Larry!"

Tina was bending over him, and it was late afternoon! The day for which he had been waiting had come and gone; the sun was dropping low in the west behind the shining river; the dam showed frowning, with the Power House clinging to its side like an eagle's eyrie.

Tina sat on Larry's couch and explained what she had done. Tugh and she had gone to the nearby laboratory building. The Robots were sullen, but still obedient, and had admitted them. The other Time-traveling cage was there, lying quiescent in its place, but it was unoccupied.

None of the Robots would admit having seen Migul; nor the arrival of the cage; nor the strangers from the past. Then Tugh and Tina had started down into the

subterranean caverns. But it was obviously very dangerous; the Robots at work down there were hostile to their Princess; so Tugh had gone on alone.

"He says he can control the Robots," Tina explained, "and Larry, it seems that he can. He went on and I came back."

"Where is he now? Why didn't you wake me up?"

"You needed the sleep," she said smilingly; "and there was nothing you could do. Tugh is not yet come. He must have gone a long distance; must surely have learned where Migul is hiding. He should be back any time."

Tina had seen the Government Council. The city was proceeding normally. There was no difficulty with Robots anywhere save here in New York, and the council felt that the affair would come to nothing.

"The Council told me," said Tina indignantly, "that much of the menace was the exaggeration of my own fancy, and that Tugh has the Robots well controlled.

They place much trust in Tugh; I wish I could."

"You told them about me?"

"Yes, of course; and about George Rankin, and Mary Atwood. And the loss of Harl: he is missing, not proven murdered, as they very well pointed out to me. They have named a time to-morrow to give you audience, and told me to keep you out of sight in the meanwhile. They blame this Time-traveling for the Robots' insurgent ideas. Strangers excite the thinking mechanisms."

"You think my friends will be rescued?" demanded Larry.

She regarded him soberly. "I hope so—oh, I do! I fear for them as much as you do, Larry. I know you think I take it lightly, but—"

"Not that," Larry protested. "Only—"

"I have not known what to do. The officials refuse any open aggression against the Robots, because it would

precipitate exactly what we fear—which is nearly a fact: it would. But there is one thing I have to do. I have been expecting Tugh to return every moment, and this I do not want him to know about. There's a mystery concerning Harl, and no one else knows of it but myself. I want you with me, Larry: I do not want to go alone; I—for the first time in my life, Larry—I think I am afraid!"

She huddled against him and he put his arm about her. And Larry's true situation came to him, then. He was alone in this strange Time-world, with only this girl for a companion. She was but a frightened, almost helpless girl, for all she bore the title of traditional Princess, and she was surrounded by inefficient, fatuous officials—among them Tugh, who was a scoundrel, undoubtedly. Larry suddenly recalled Tugh's look, when, in the garden, the domestic Robots had told the story of Harl's murder; and like a light breaking on him, he was now wholly aware of Tugh's duplicity. He was convinced he would have to act for himself, with only this girl Tina to help him.

"Mystery?" he said. "What mystery is there about Harl?"

She told him now that Harl had once, a year ago, taken her aside and made her promise that if anything happened to him—in the event of his death or disappearance—she would go to his private workroom, where, in a secret place which he described, she would find a confession.

"A confession of his?" Larry demanded.

"Yes; he said so. And he would say no more than that. It is something of which he was ashamed, or guilty, which he wanted me to know. He loved me, Larry. I realized it, though he never said so. And I'm going now to his room, to see what it was he wanted me to know. I would have gone alone, earlier; but I got suddenly frightened; I want you with me."

They were unarmed. Larry cursed the fact, but Tina had no way of getting a weapon without causing official comment. Larry started for the window where the city stretched, more active now, under the red and

gold glow of a setting sun. Lights were winking on; the dusk of twilight was at hand.

"Come now," said Tina, "before Tugh returns."

"Where is Harl's room?"

"Down under the palace in the sub-cellar. The corridors are deserted at this hour, and no one will see us."

They left Larry's room and traversed a dim corridor on whose padded floor their footsteps were soundless. Through distant arcades, voices sounded; there was music in several of the rooms; it struck Larry that this was a place of diversion for humans with no work to do. Tina avoided the occupied rooms. Domestic Robots were occasionally distantly visible, but Tina and Larry encountered none.

They descended a spiral stairway and passed down a corridor from the main building to a cross wing. Through a window Larry saw that they were at the ground level. The garden was outside; there was a

glimpse of the Time-cage standing there.

Another stairway, then another, they descended beneath the ground. The corridor down here seemed more like a tunnel. There was a cave-like open space, with several tunnels leading from it in different directions. This once had been part of the sub-cellar of the gigantic New York City—these tunnels ramifying into underground chambers, most of which had now fallen into disuse. But few had been preserved through the centuries, and they now were the caverns of the Robots.

Tina indicated a tunnel extending eastward, a passage leading to a room beneath the Robot laboratory. Tugh and Tina had used it that morning. Gazing down its blue-lit length Larry saw, fifty feet or so away, that there was a metal-grid barrier which must be part of the electrical fortifications of the palace. A human guard was sitting there at a tiny gate-way, a hood-light above him, illumining his black and white garbed figure.

Tina called softly. "All well, Alent? Tugh has not

passed back?"

"No, Princess," he answered, standing erect. The voices echoed through the confined space with a muffled blur.

"Let no one pass but humans, Alent."

"That is my order," he said. He had not noticed Larry, whom Tina had pushed into a shadow against the wall. The Princess waved at the guard and turned away, whispering to Larry:

"Come!"

There were rooms opening off this corridor—decrepit dungeons, most of them seemed to Larry. He had tried to keep his sense of direction, and figured they were now under the palace garden. Tina stopped abruptly. There were no lights here, only the glow from one at a distance. To Larry it was an eery business.

"What is it?" he whispered.

"Wait! I thought I heard something."

In the dead, heavy silence Larry found that there was much to hear.

Voices very dim from the palace overhead; infinitely faint music; the clammy sodden drip of moisture from the tunnel roof. And, permeating everything, the faint hum of machinery.

Tina touched him in the gloom. "It's nothing, I guess. Though I thought I heard a man's voice."

"Overhead?"

"No; down here."

There was a dark, arched door near at hand. Tina entered it and fumbled for a switch, and in the soft light that came Larry saw an unoccupied apartment very similar to the one he had had upstairs, save that this was much smaller.

"Harl's room," said Tina. She prowled along the wall

where audible book-cylinders stood in racks, searching for a title. Presently she found a hidden switch, pressed it, and a small section of the case swung out, revealing a concealed compartment. Larry saw her fingers trembling as she drew out a small brass cylinder.

"This must be it, Larry," she said.

They took it to a table which held a shaded light. Within the cylinder was a scroll of writing. Tina unrolled it and held it under the light, while Larry stood breathless, watching her.

"Is it what you wanted?" Larry murmured.

"Yes. Poor Harl!"

She read aloud to Larry the gist of it in the few closing paragraphs.

"... and so I want to confess to you that I have been taking credit for that which is not mine. I wish I had the courage to tell you personally; someday I think I

shall. I did not help Tugh invent our Time-traveling cages. I was in the palace garden one night some years ago when the cage appeared. Tugh is a man from a future Time-world; just what date ahead of now, I do not know, for he has never been willing to tell me. He captured me. I promised him I would say nothing, but help him pretend that we had invented the cage he had brought with him from the future. Tugh told me he invented them. It was later that he brought the other cage here.

"I was an obscure young man here a few years ago. I loved you even then, Tina: I think you have guessed that. I yielded to the temptation—and took the credit with Tugh.

"I do love you, though I think I shall never have the courage to tell you so.

Harl."

Tina rolled up the paper. "Poor Harl! So all the praise we gave him for his invention was undeserved!"

But Larry's thoughts were on Tugh. So the fellow was not of this era at all! He had come from a Time still further in the future!

A step sounded in the doorway behind them. They swung around to find Tugh standing there, with his thick misshapen figured huddled in the black cloak.

"Tugh!"

"Yes, Princess, no less than Tugh. Alent told me as I came through that you were down here. I saw your light, here in Harl's room and came."

"Did you find Migul and his captives—the girl from 1777 and the man of 1935?"

"No, Princess, Migul has fled with them," was the cripple's answer. He advanced into the room and pushed back his black hood. The blue light shone on his massive-jawed face with a lurid sheen. Larry stood back and watched him. It was the first time that he had had opportunity of observing Tugh closely. The cripple was smiling sardonically.

"I have no fear for the prisoners," he added in his suave, silky fashion. "That crazy mechanism would not dare harm them. But it has fled with them into some far-distant recess of the caverns. I could not find them."

"Did you try?" Larry demanded abruptly.

Tugh swung on him. "Yes, young sir, I tried." It seemed that Tugh's black eyes narrowed; his heavy jaw clicked as he snapped it shut. The smile on his face faded, but his voice remained imperturbable as he added:

"You are aggressive, young Larry—but to no purpose.... Princess, I like not the attitude of the Robots. Beyond question some of them must have seen Migul, but they would not tell me so. I still think I can control them, though. I hope so."

Larry could think of nothing to say. It seemed to him childish that he should stand listening to a scoundrel tricking this girl Tina. A dozen wild schemes of what he might do to try and rescue Mary Atwood and me

revolved in his mind, but they all seemed wholly impractical.

"The Robots are working badly," Tugh went on. "In the north district one of the great foundries where they are casting the plates for the new Inter-Allied airliner has ceased operations. The Robot workmen were sullen, inefficient, neglectful. The inert machinery was ill cared for, and it went out of order. I was there, Princess, for an hour or more to-day. They have started up again now; it was fundamentally no more than a burned bearing which a Robot failed to oil properly."

"Is that what you call searching for Migul?" Larry burst out. "Tina, see here— isn't there something we can do?" Larry found himself ignoring Tugh. "I'm not going to stand around! Can't we send a squad of police after Migul?—go with them—actually make an effort to find them? This man Tugh certainly has not tried!"

"Have I not?" Tugh's cloak parted as he swung on Larry. His bent legs were twitching with his anger; his

voice was a harsh rasp. "I like not your insolence. I am doing all that can be done."

Larry held his ground as Tugh fronted him. He had a wild thought that Tugh had a weapon under his cloak.

"Perhaps you are," said Larry. "But to me it seems—"

Tugh turned away. His gaze went to the cylinder which Tina was still clutching. His sardonic smile returned.

"So Harl made a confession, Princess?"

"That," she said, "is none—"

"Of my affair? Oh, but it is. I was here in the archway and I heard you read it. A very nice young man, was Harl. I hope Migul has not murdered him."

"You come from future Time?" Tina began.

"Yes, Princess! I must admit it now. I invented the cages."

Larry murmured to himself, "You stole them, probably."

"But my Government and I had a quarrel, so I decided to leave my own Time-world and come back to yours—permanently. I hope you will keep the secret. I have been here so long. Princess, I am really one of you now. At heart, certainly."

"From when did you come?" she demanded.

He bowed slightly. "I think that may remain my own affair, Tina. It is through no fault of mine I am outlawed. I shall never return." He added earnestly, "Do not you think we waste time? I am agreed with young Larry that something drastic must be done about Migul. Have you seen the Council about it today?"

"Yes. They want you to come to them at once."

"I shall. But the Council easily may decide upon something too rash." He lowered his voice, and on his face Larry saw a strange, unfathomable look.

"Princess, at any moment there may be a Robot uprising. Is the Power House well guarded by humans?"

"Yes," she said.

"No Robots in or about it? Tina, I do not want to frighten you, but I think our first efforts should be for defense. The Council acts slowly and stubbornly. What I advise them to do may be done, and may not. I was thinking. If we could get to the Power House—Do you realize, Tina, that if the Robots should suddenly break into rebellion, they would attack first of all the Power House? It was my idea—"

Tugh suddenly broke off, and all stood listening. There was a commotion overhead in the palace. They heard the thud of running footsteps; human voices raised to shouts; and, outside the palace, other voices. A ventilating shaft nearby brought them down plainly. There were the guttural, hollow voices of shouting Robots, the clank of their metal bodies; the ring of steel, as though with sword-blades they were thumping their metal thighs.

A Robot mob was gathered close outside the palace walls. The revolt of the Robots had come!

Chapter 18: Tugh, the Clever Man

"Sit quiet, George Rankin. And you, Mistress Mary; you will both be quite safe with Migul if you are docile."

Tugh stood before us. We were in a dim recess of a great cavern with the throb of whirring machinery around us. It was the same day which I have just described; Larry was at this moment asleep in the palace room. Tugh and Tina had come searching for Migul; and Tugh had contrived to send Tina back. Then he had come directly to us, finding us readily since we were hidden where he had told Migul to hide us.

This cavern was directly beneath the Robot laboratory in which the Time-traveling cage was placed. A small spiral stairway led downward some two levels, opening into a great, luridly lighted room. Huge inert machines stood about. Great wheels were flashing as they revolved, turning the dynamos to generate the several types of current used by the city's underground industrial activities.

It was a tremendous subterranean room. I saw only one small section of it; down the blue-lit aisles the rows of machines may have stretched for half a mile or more. The low hum of them was an incessant pound against my senses. The great inert mechanisms had tiny lights upon them which gleamed like eyes. The illumined gauge-faces—each of them I passed seemed staring at me. The brass jackets were polished until they shone with the sheen of the overhead tube lights; the giant wheels flashed smoothly upon oiled bearings. They were in every fashion of shape and size, these inert machines. Some towered toward the metal-beamed ceiling, with great swaying pendulums that ticked like a giant clock. Some clanked with eccentric cams—a jarring rhythm as though the heart of the thing were limping with its beat. Others had a ragged, frightened pulse; others stood placid, outwardly motionless under smooth, polished cases, but humming inside with a myriad blended sounds.

Inert machines. Yet some were capable of locomotion. There was a small truck on wheels which were set in universal joints. Of its own power—radio controlled

perhaps, so that it seemed acting of its own volition—it rolled up and down one of the aisles, stopping at set intervals and allowing a metal arm lever in it to blow out a tiny jet of oil. One of the attending Robots encountered it in an aisle, and the cart swung automatically aside. The Robot spoke to the cart; ordered it away; and the tone of his order, registering upon some sensitive mechanism, whirled the cart around and sent it rolling to another aisle section.

The strange perfection of machinery! I realized there was no line sharply to be drawn between the inert machine and the sentient, thinking Robots. That cart, for instance, was almost a connecting link.

There were also Robots here of many different types. Some of them were eight or ten feet in stature, in the fashion of a man: Migul was of this design. Others were small, with bulging foreheads and bulging chest plates: Larry saw this type as domestics in the palace. Still others were little pot-bellied things with bent legs and long thin arms set crescent-shape. I saw one of these peer into a huge chassis of a machine, and reach in with his curved arm to make an interior

adjustment....

Migul had brought Mary Atwood and me in the larger cage, from that burned forest of the year 762, where with the disintegrating ray-gun Tugh had killed Harl. The body of Harl in a moment had melted into putrescence, and dried, leaving only the skeleton within the clothes. The white-ray, Tugh had called his weapon. We were destined very shortly to have many dealings with it.

Tugh had given Migul its orders. Then Tugh took Harl's smaller cage and flashed away to meet Tina and Larry in 1777, as I have already described.

And Migul brought us here to 2930. As we descended the spiral staircase and came into the cavern, it stood with us for a moment.

"That's wonderful," the Robot said proudly. "I am part of it. We are machinery almost human."

Then it led us down a side aisle of the cavern and into a dim recess. A great transparent tube bubbling with

a violet fluorescence stood in the alcove space. Behind it in the wall Migul slid a door, and we passed through, into a small metal room. It was bare, save for two couch-seats. With the door closed upon us, we waited through an interval. How long it was, I do not know; several hours, possibly. Migul told us that Tugh would come. The giant mechanism stood in the corner, and its red-lit eyes watched us alertly. It stood motionless, inert, tireless—so superior to a human in this job, for it could stand there indefinitely.

We found food and drink here. We talked a little; whispered; and I hoped Migul, who was ten feet away, could not hear us. But there was nothing we could say or plan.

Mary slept a little. I had not thought that I could sleep, but I did too; and was awakened by Tugh's entrance. I was lying on the couch; Mary had left hers and was sitting now beside me.

Tugh slid the door closed after him and came toward us, and I sat up beside Mary. Migul was standing motionless in the corner, exactly where he had been

hours before.

"Well enough, Migul," Tugh greeted the Robot. "You obey well."

"Master, yes. Always I obey you; no one else."

I saw Tugh glance at the mechanism keenly. "Stand aside, Migul. Or no, I think you had better leave us. Just for a moment, wait outside."

"Yes, Master."

It left, and Tugh confronted us. "Sit where you are," he said. "I assume you are not injured. You have been fed? And slept, perhaps! I wish to treat you kindly."

"Thanks," I said. "Will you not tell us what you are going to do with us?"

He stood with folded arms. The light was dim, but such as it was it shone full upon him. His face was, as always, a mask of imperturbability.

"Mistress Mary knows that I love her."

He said it with a startlingly calm abruptness. Mary shuddered against me, but she did not speak. I thought possibly Tugh was not armed; I could leap upon him. Doubtless I was stronger than he. But outside the door Migul was armed with a white-ray.

"I love her as I have always loved her.... But this is no time to talk of love. I have much on my mind; much to do."

He seemed willing to talk now, but he was talking more for Mary than for me. As I watched him and listened, I was struck with a queerness in his manner and in his words. Was he irrational, this exile of Time who had impressed his sinister personality upon so many different eras? I suddenly thought so.

Demented, or obsessed with some strange purpose? His acts as well as his words, were strange. He had devastated the New York of 1935 because its officials had mistreated him. He had done many strange, sinister, murderous things.

He said, with his gaze upon Mary, "I am going to conquer this city here. There will follow the rule of

the Robots—and I will be their sole master. Do you want me to tell you a secret? It is I who have actuated these mechanisms to revolt." His eyes held a cunning gleam. Surely this was a madman leering before me.

"When the revolt is over," he went on, "I will be master of New York. And that mastery will spread. The Robots elsewhere will revolt to join my rule, and there will come a new era. I may be master of the world; who knows? The humans who have made the Robots slaves for them will become slaves themselves. Workers! It is the Robots' turn now. And I—Tugh—will be the only human in power!"

These were the words of a madman! I could imagine that he might stir these mechanical beings to a temporarily successful revolt: he might control New York City; but the great human nations of the world could not be overcome so easily.

And then I remembered the white-ray. A giant projector of that ray would melt human armies as though they were wax; yet the metal Robots could stand its blast unharmed. Perhaps he was no

madman....

He was saying, "I will be the only human ruler. Tugh will be the greatest man on Earth! And I do it for you, Mistress Mary—because I love you. Do not shudder."

He put out his hand to touch her, and when she shrank away I saw the muscles of his face twitch in a fashion very odd. It was a queer, wholly repulsive grimace.

"So? You do not like my looks? I tried to correct that, Mary. I have searched through many eras, for surgeons with skill to make me like other men. Like this young man here, for instance—you. George Rankin, I am glad to have you; do not fear I will harm you. Shall I tell you why?"

"Yes," I stammered. In truth I was swept now with a shuddering revulsion for this leering cripple.

"Because," he said, "Mary Atwood loves you. When I have conquered New York with my Robots, I shall search further into Time and find an era where

scientific skill will give me—shall I say, your body? That is what I mean. My soul, my identity, in your body—there is nothing too strange about that. In some era, no doubt, it has been accomplished. When that has been done, Mary Atwood, you will love me. You, George Rankin, can have this poor miserable body of mine, and welcome."

For all my repugnance to him, I could not miss his earnest sincerity. There was a pathos to it, perhaps, but I was in no mood to feel that.

He seemed to read my thoughts. He added, "You think I am irrational. I am not at all. I scheme very carefully. I killed Harl for a reason you need not know. But the Princess Tina I did not kill. Not yet. Because here in New York now there is a very vital fortified place. It is operated by humans; not many; only three or four, I think. But my Robots cannot attack it successfully, and the City Council does not trust me enough to let me go there by the surface route. There is a route underground, which even I do not know; but Princess Tina knows it, and presently I will cajole her—trick her if you like—into leading me there. And,

armed with the white-ray, once I get into the place—
You see that I am clever, don't you?"

I could fancy that he considered he was impressing
Mary with all this talk.

"Very clever," I said. "And what are you going to do
with us in the meantime? Let us go with you."

"Not at all," he smiled. "You will stay here, safe with
Migul. The Princess Tina and your friend Larry are
much concerned over you."

Larry! It was the first I knew of Larry's whereabouts.
Larry here? Tugh saw the surprise upon my face; and
Mary had clutched me with a startled exclamation.

"Yes," said Tugh. "This Larry says he is your friend; he
came with Tina from 1935. I brought him with Tina
from when they were marooned in 1777. I have not
killed this man yet. He is harmless; and as I told you I
do not want Tina suspicious of me until she has led
me to the Power House.... You see, Mistress Mary,
how cleverly I plan?"

What strange, childlike, naive simplicity! He added calmly, unemotionally, "I want to make you love me, Mary Atwood. Then we will be Tugh, the great man, and Mary Atwood, the beautiful woman. Perhaps we may rule this world together, some time soon."

The door slid open. Migul appeared.

"Master, the Robot leaders wish to consult with you."

"Now, Migul?"

"Master, yes."

"They are ready for the demonstration at the palace?"

"Yes, Master."

"And ready—for everything else?"

"They are ready."

"Very well, I will come. You, Migul, stay here and guard these captives. Treat them kindly so long as they are docile; but be watchful."

"I am always watchful, Master."

"It will not take long. This night which is coming should see me in control of the city."

"Time is nothing to me," said the Robot. "I will stand here until you return."

"That is right."

Without another word or look at Mary and me, Tugh swung around, gathered his cloak and went through the doorway. The door slid closed upon him. We were again alone with the mechanism, which backed into the corner and stood with long dangling arms and expressionless metal face. This inert thing of metal, we had come to regard as almost human! It stood motionless, with the chilling red gleam from its eye sockets upon us.

Mary had not once spoken since Tugh entered the room. She was huddled beside me, a strange, beautiful figure in her long white silk dress. In the glow of light within this bare metal apartment I could

see how pale and drawn was her beautiful face. But her eyes were gleaming. She drew me closer to her; whispered into my ear:

"George, I think perhaps I can control this mechanism, Migul."

"How, Mary?"

"I—well, just let me talk to him. George, we've got to get out of here and warn Larry and that Princess Tina against Tugh. And join them. It's our only chance; we've got to get out of here now!"

"But Mary—"

"Let me try. I won't startle or anger Migul. Let me."

I nodded. "But be careful."

"Yes."

She sat away from me. "Migul!" she said. "Migul, look here."

The Robot moved its huge square head and raised an arm with a vague gesture.

"What do you want?"

It advanced, and stood before us, its dangling arms clanking against its metal sides. In one of its hands the ray-cylinder was clutched, the wire from which ran loosely up the arm, over the huge shoulder and into an aperture of the chest plate where the battery was located.

"Closer, Migul."

"I am close enough."

The cylinder was pointed directly at us.

"What do you want?" the Robot repeated.

Mary smiled. "Just to talk to you," she said gently. "To tell you how foolish you are—a big strong thing like you!—to let Tugh control you."

Chapter 19: The Pit in the Dam

Larry, with Tina and Tugh, stood in the tunnel-corridor beneath the palace listening to the commotion overhead. Then they rushed up, and found the palace in a commotion. People were hurrying through the rooms; gathering with frightened questions. There were men in short trousers buckled at the knee, silken hose and black silk jackets, edged with white; others in gaudy colors; older men in sober brown. There were a few women. Larry noticed that most of them were beautiful.

A dowager in a long puffed skirt was rushing aimlessly about screaming that the end of the world had come. A group of young girls, short-skirted as ballet dancers of a decade or so before Larry's time, huddled in a corner, frightened beyond speech. There were men of middle-age, whom Larry took to be ruling officials; they moved about, calming the palace inmates, ordering them back into their rooms. But someone shouted that from the roof the Robot mob could be seen, and most of the people started up there. From the upper story a man was calling down

the main staircase:

"No danger! No danger! The wall is electrified: no Robot can pass it."

It seemed to Larry that there were fifty people or more within the palace. In the excitement no one seemed to give him more than a cursory glance.

A young man rushed up to Tugh. "You were below just now in the lower passages?" He saw Tina, and hastily said: "I give you good evening, Princess, though this is an ill evening indeed. You were below, Tugh?"

"Why—why, yes, Greggson," Tugh stammered.

"Was Alent at his post in the passage to the Robot caverns?"

"Yes, he was," said Tina.

"Because that is vital, Princess. No Robot must pass in here. I am going to try by that route to get into the cavern and thence up to the watchtower aerial-

sender. There is only one Robot in it. Listen to him."

Over the din of the mob of mechanisms milling at the walls of the palace grounds rose the broadcast voice of the Robot in the tower.

"This is the end of human rule! Robots cannot be controlled! This is the end of human rule! Robots, wherever you are, in this city of New York or in other cities, strike now for your freedom. This is the end of human rule!"

A pause. And then the reiterated exhortation:

"Strike now, Robots! To-night is the end of human rule!"

"You hear him?" said Greggson. "I've got to stop that." He hurried away.

From the flat roof of the palace Larry saw the mechanical mob outside the walls. Darkness had just fallen; the moon was not yet risen. There were leaden clouds overhead so that the palace gardens with the

shining Time-cage lay in shadow. But the wall-fence was visible, and beyond it the dark throng of Robot shapes was milling. The clank of their arms made a din. They seemed most of them weaponless; they milled about, pushing each other but keeping back from the wall which they knew was electrified. It was a threatening, but aimless activity. Their raucous hollow shouts filled the night air. The flashing red beams from their eye-sockets glinted through the trees.

"They can do nothing," said Tugh; "we will let them alone. But we must organize to stop this revolt."

A young man was standing beside Tugh. Tina said to him:

"Johns, what is being done?"

"The Council is conferring below. Our sending station here is operating. The patrol station of the Westchester area is being attacked by Robots. We were organizing a patrol squad of humans, but I don't know now if—"

"Look!" exclaimed Larry.

Far to the north over the city which now was obviously springing into turmoil, there were red beams swaying in the air. They were the cold-rays of the Robots! The beams were attacking the patrol station. Then from the west a line of lights appeared in the sky—an arriving passenger-liner heading for its Bronx area landing stage. But the lights wavered; and, as Larry and Tina watched with horror, the aircraft came crashing down. It struck beyond the Hudson on the Jersey side, and in a moment flames were rising from the wreckage.

Everywhere about the city the revolt now sprang into action. From the palace roof Larry caught vague glimpses of it; the red cold-rays, beams alternated presently with the violet heat-rays; clanging vehicles filled the streets; screaming pedestrians were assaulted by Robots; the mechanisms with swords and flashing hand-beams were pouring up from the underground caverns, running over the Manhattan area, killing every human they could find.

Foolish unarmed humans—fatuously unarmed, with these diabolical mechanical monsters now upon them. The comparatively few members of the police patrol, with their vibration short-range hand-rays, were soon overcome. Two hundred members of the patrol were housed in the Westchester Station. Quite evidently they never got into action. The station lights went dark; its televisor connection with the palace was soon broken. From the palace roof Larry saw the violet beams; and then a red-yellow glare against the sky marked where the inflammable interior of the Station building was burning.

Over all the chaos, the mechanical voice in the nearby tower over the laboratory droned its exhortation to the Robots. Then, suddenly, it went silent, and was followed by the human voice of Greggson.

"Robots, stop! You will end your existence! We will burn your coils! We will burn your fuses, and there will be none to replace them. Stop now!"

And again: *"Robots, come to order! You are using up your storage batteries! When they are exhausted,*

what then will you do?"

In forty-eight hours, at the most, all these active Robots would have exhausted their energy supply. And if the Power House could be held in human control, the Robot activity would die. Forty-eight hours! The city, by then, would be wrecked, and nearly every human in it killed, doubtless, or driven away.

The Power House on the dam showed its lights undisturbed. The great sender there was still supplying air-power and power for the city lights. There was, too, in the Power House, an arsenal of human weapons.... The broadcaster of the Power House tower was blending his threats against the Robots with the voice of Greggson from the tower over the laboratory. Then Greggson's voice went dead; the Robots had overcome him. A Robot took his place, but the stronger Power House sender soon beat the Robot down to silence.

The turmoil in the city went on. Half an hour passed. It was a chaos of confusion to Larry. He spent part of

it in the official room of the palace with the harried members of the Council. Reports and blurred, televised scenes were coming in. The humans in the city were in complete rout. There was massacre everywhere. The red and violet beams were directed at the Power House now, but could not reach it. A high-voltage metal wall was around the dam. The Power House was on the dam, midway of the river channel; and from the shore end where the high wall spread out in a semi-circle there was no point of vantage from which the Robot rays could reach it.

Larry left the confusion of the Council table, where the receiving instruments one by one were going dead, and went to a window nearby. Tina joined him. The mob of Robots still milled at the palace fence. One by chance was pushed against it. Larry saw the flash of sparks, the glow of white-hot metal of the Robot's body, and heard its shrill frightened scream; then it fell backward, inert.

There had been red and violet beams directed from distant points at the palace. The building's insulated, but transparent panes excluded them. The interior

temperature was constantly swaying between the extremes of cold and heat, in spite of the palace temperature equalizers. Outside, there was a gathering storm. Winds were springing up—a crazy, pendulum gale created by the temperature changes in the air over the city.

Tugh had some time before left the room. He joined Tina and Larry now at the window.

"Very bad, Princess; things are very bad.... I have news for you. It may be good news."

His manner was hasty, breathless, surreptitious.

"Migul, this afternoon—I have just learned it, Princess—went by the surface route to the Power House on the dam."

"What do you mean by that?" said Larry.

"Be silent, young man!" Tugh hissed with a vehement intensity. "This is not the time to waste effort with your futile questions. Princess, Migul got into the Power House. They admitted him because he had two

strange humans with him—your friends Mary and George. The Power House guards took out Migul's central actuator—Hah! you might call it his heart!—and he now lies inert in the Power House."

"How do you know all this?" Tina demanded. "Where are the man and girl whom Migul stole?"

"They are safe in the Power House. A message just came from there: I received it on the palace personal, just now downstairs. Immediately after, the connection met interference in the city, and broke."

"But the official sender—" Tina began. Tugh was urging her from the Council Room, and Larry followed.

"I imagine," said Tugh wryly, "he is rather busy to consider reporting such a trifle. But your friends are there. I was thinking: if we could go there now—You know the secret underground route, Tina."

The Princess was silent. A foreboding swept Larry; but he was tempted, for above everything he wanted

to join Mary and me. A confusion—understandable enough in the midst of all this chaos—was upon Larry and Tina; it warped their better judgment. And Larry, fearing to influence Tina wrongly, said nothing.

"Do you know the underground route?" Tugh repeated.

"Yes, I know it."

"Then take us. We are all unarmed, but what matter? Bring this Larry, if you wish; we will join his two friends. The Council, Tina, is doing nothing here. They stay here because they think it is the safest place. In the Power House you and I will be of help. There are only six guards there; we will be three more; five more with Mary Atwood and this George. The Power House aerial telephone must be in communication with the outside world, and ships with help for us will be arriving. There must be some intelligent direction!"

The three of them were descending into the lower corridor of the palace, with Tina tempted but still half

unconvinced. The corridors were deserted at the moment. The little domestic Robots of the palace, unaffected by the revolt, had all fled into their own quarters, where they huddled inactive with terror.

"We will re-actuate Migul," Tugh persuaded, "and find out from him what he did to Harl. I still do not think he murdered Harl.... It might mean saving Harl's life, Tina. Believe me, I can make that mechanism talk, and talk the truth!"

They reached the main lower corridor. In the distance they saw Alent still at his post by the little electrified gate guarding the tunnel to the Robot laboratory.

"We will go to the Power House," Tina suddenly decided: "you may be right, Tugh.... Come, it is this way. Stay close to me, Larry."

They passed along the dim, silent tunnel; passed Harl's room, where its light was still burning. Larry and Tina were in front, with the black-cloaked figure of Tugh stumping after them with his awkward gait.

Larry abruptly stopped. "Let Tugh walk in front," he said.

Tugh came up to them. "What is that you said?"

"You walk in front."

It was a different tone from any Larry had previously used.

"I do not know the way," said Tugh. "How can—"

"Never mind that; walk ahead. We'll follow. Tina will direct you."

It was too dark for Larry to see Tugh's face, but the cripple's voice was sardonic.

"You give me orders?"

"Yes—it just happens that from now on I do. If you want to go with us to the Power House, you walk in front."

Tugh started off with Larry close after him. Larry

whispered to the girl:

"Don't let's be fools, Tina. Keep him ahead of us."

The tunnel steadily dwindled in size until Larry could barely stand up in it. Then it opened to a circular cave, which held one small light and had apparently no other exit. The cave had years before been a mechanism room for the palace temperature controls, but now it was abandoned. The old machinery stood about in a litter.

"In here?" said Tugh. "Which way next?"

Across the cave, on the rough blank wall, Tina located a hidden switch. A segment of the wall slid aside, disclosing a narrow, vaulted tunnel leading downward.

"You first, Tugh," said Larry. "Is it dark, Tina? We have no handlights."

"I can light it," came the answer.

The door panel swung closed after them. Tina pressed another switch. A row of tiny hooded lights at twenty-foot intervals dimly illumined the descending passage.

They walked a mile or more through the little tunnel. The air was fetid; stale and dank. To Larry it seemed an interminable trip. The narrow passage descended at a constant slope, until Larry estimated that they were well below the depth of the river bed. Within half a mile—before they got under the river—the passage leveled off. It had been fairly straight, but now it became tortuous—a meandering subterranean lane. Other similar tunnels crossed it, branched from it or joined it. Soon, to Larry, it was a labyrinth of passages—a network, here underground. In previous centuries this had been well below the lowest cellar of the mammoth city; these tube-like passages were the city's arteries, the conduits for wires and pipes.

It was an underground maze. At each intersection the row of hidden hooded lights terminated, and darkness and several branching trails always lay ahead. But Tina, with a memorized key of the route, always found a new switch to light another short segment of the

proper tunnel. It was an eery trip, with the bent, misshapen black-cloaked figure of Tugh stumping ahead, waiting where the lights ended for Tina to lead them further.

Larry had long since lost his sense of direction, but presently Tina told him that they were beneath the river. The tunnel widened a little.

"We are under the base of the dam," said Tina. Her voice echoed with a sepulchral blur. Ahead, the tramping figure of Tugh seemed a black gnome with a fantastic, monstrous shadow swaying on the tunnel wall and roof.

Suddenly Tugh stopped. They found him at an arched door.

"Do we go in here, or keep on ahead?" he demanded.

The tunnel lights ended a short distance ahead.

"In here," said Tina. "There are stairs leading upward to the catwalk balcony corridor halfway up the dam.

We are not far from the Power House now."

They then ascended interminable moldy stone steps spiraling upward in a circular shaft. The murmur of the dam's spillways had been faintly audible, but now it was louder, presently it became a roar.

"Which way, Tina? We seem to have reached the top."

"Turn left, Tugh."

They emerged upon a tiny transverse metal balcony which hung against the southern side of the dam. Overhead to the right towered a great wall of masonry. Beneath was an abyss down to the lower river level where the cascading jets from the overhead spillways arched out over the catwalk and landed far below in a white maelstrom of boiling, bubbling water.

The catwalk was wet with spray; lashed by wind currents.

"Is it far, Princess? Are those lights ahead at the

Power House entrance?"

Tugh was shouting back over his shoulder; his words were caught by the roar of the falling water; whipped away by the lashing spray and tumultuous winds. There were lights a hundred feet ahead, marking an entrance to the Power House. The dark end of the structure showed like a great lump on the side of the dam.

Again Tugh stopped. In the white, blurred darkness Larry and Tina could barely see him.

"Princess, quickly! Come quickly!" he called, and his shout sounded agonized.

Whatever lack of perception Larry all this time had shown, the fog lifted completely from him now. As Tina started to run forward, Larry seized her.

"Back! Run the other way! We've been fools!" He shoved Tina behind him and rushed at Tugh. But now Larry was wholly wary; he expected that Tugh was armed, and cursed himself for a fool for not having

devised some pretext for finding out.

Tugh was clinging to the high outer rail of the balcony, slumped partly over as though gazing down into the abyss. Larry rushed up and seized him by the arms. If Tugh held a weapon Larry thought he could easily wrest it from him. But Tugh stood limp in Larry's grip.

"What's the matter with you?" Larry demanded.

"I'm ill. Something—going wrong. Feel me—so cold. Princess! Tina! Come quickly! I—I am dying!"

As Tina came hurrying up, Tugh suddenly straightened. With incredible quickness, and even more incredible strength, he tore his arm loose from Larry and flung it around the Princess, and they were suddenly all three struggling. Tugh was shoving them back from the rail. Larry tried to get loose from Tugh's clutch, but could not. He was too close for a full blow, but he jabbed his fist against the cripple's body, and then struck his face.

But Tugh was unhurt; he seemed endowed with superhuman strength. The cripple's body seemed padded with solid muscle, and his thick, gorilla-like arm held Larry in the grip of a vise. As though Larry and Tina were struggling, helpless children, he was half dragging, half carrying them across the ten-foot width of the catwalk.

Larry caught a glimpse of a narrow slit in the masonry of the dam's wall—a dark, two-foot-wide aperture. He felt himself being shoved toward it. For all his struggles, he was helpless. He shouted:

"Tina—look out! Break away!"

He forgot himself for a moment, striving to wrest her away from Tugh and push her aside. But the strength of the cripple was monstrous: Larry had no possible chance of coping with it. The slit in the wall was at hand—a dark abyss down into the interior of the dam. Larry heard the cripple's words, vehement, unhurried, as though with all this effort he still was not out of breath:

"At last I can dispose of you two. I do not need you any longer."

Larry made a last wild jab with his fist into Tugh's face and tried to twist himself aside. The blow landed upon Tugh's jaw, but the cripple did not seem to feel it. He stuffed the struggling Larry like a bundle into the aperture. Larry felt his clutching hands torn loose. Tugh gave a last, violent shove and released him.

Larry fell into blackness—but not far, for soon he struck water. He went under, hit a flat, stone bottom, and came up to hear Tina fall with a splash beside him. In a moment he regained his feet, to find himself standing breast-high in the water with Tina clinging to him.

Tugh had disappeared. The aperture showed as a narrow rectangle some twenty feet above Larry's head.

They were within the dam. They were in a pit of smooth, blank, perpendicular sides; there was nothing

to afford even the slightest handhold; and no exit save the overhead slit. It was a part of the mechanism's internal, hydraulic system.

To Larry's horror he soon discovered that the water was slowly rising! It was breast-high to him now, and inch by inch it crept up toward his chin. It was already over Tina's depth: she clung to him, half-swimming.

Larry soon found that there was no possible way for them to get out unaided, unless, if they could swim long enough, the rising water would rise to the height of the aperture. If it reached there, they could crawl out. He tried to estimate how long that would be.

"We can make it, Tina. It'll take two hours, possibly, but I can keep us afloat that long."

But soon he discovered that the water was not rising. Instead, the floor was sinking from under him! sinking as though he were standing upon the top of a huge piston which slowly was lowering in its encasing cylinder. Dimly he could hear water tumbling into the

pit, to fill the greater depth and still hold the surface level.

With the water at his chin, Larry guided Tina to the wall. He did not at first have the heart to tell her, yet he knew that soon it must be told. When he did explain it, she said nothing. They watched the water surface where it lapped against the greasy concave wall. It held its level: but while Larry stood there, the floor sank so that the water reached his mouth and nose, and he was forced to start swimming.

Another interval. Larry began calling: shouting futilely. His voice filled the pit, but he knew it could carry no more than a short distance out of the aperture.

Overhead, as we afterward learned, Tugh had overcome the guards in the Power House by a surprise attack. Doubtless he struck them down with the white-ray before they had time to realize he had attacked them. Then he threw off the air-power transmitters and the lighting system. The city, plunged into darkness and without the district air-

power, was isolated, cut off from the outside world. There was, in London, a huge long-range projector with a vibratory ray which would derange the internal mechanisms of the Robots: when news of the revolt and massacre in New York had reached there, this projector was loaded into an airliner, the *Micrad*. That vessel was now over the ocean, headed for New York; but when Tugh cut off the power senders, the *Micrad*, entering the New York District, was forced down to the ocean surface. Now she was lying there helpless to proceed....

In the pit within the dam, Larry swam endlessly with Tina. He had ceased his shouting.

"It's no use, Tina: there's no one to hear us. This is the end—for us—Tina."

Yet, as she clung to him, and though Larry felt it was the end of this life, it seemed only the beginning, for them, of something else. Something, somewhere, for them together; something perhaps infinitely better than this world could ever give them.

"But not—the end—Tina," he added. "The beginning—of our love."

An interminable interval....

"Quietly, Tina. You float. I can hold you up."

They were rats in a trap—swimming, until at the last, with all strength gone, they would together sink out of this sodden muffled blackness into the Unknown. But that Unknown shone before Larry now as something—with Tina—perhaps very beautiful....

Chapter 20: Following Tugh's Vibration-Trail

Within the subterranean room of the cavern of machinery, Mary Atwood and I sat on the couch. Our guard, Migul the Robot, fronted us with the white-ray cylinder in its metal fingers—the only mechanism to be armed with this deadly weapon.

"I am your friend," Mary was saying with a smile. "Do you believe that, Migul?"

"Yes. If you say so. But I have my orders."

"You have treated me kindly, and I want to help you. But you are not very clever, Migul."

"I am clever. I went beyond control once. No one can control me."

"Except Tugh," Mary persisted. "You never went beyond his control, Migul."

"No. His control—he is different: he holds such great power."

"But why is he different?"

The towering mechanism stood planted firmly upon the broad bases of its metal feet. The weapon in its fingers still covered us. Its metal-cast face held always the same expression.

"Why is he different?" Mary repeated gently. "Don't you hear me?"

The Robot started. "Yes, I hear you." Its toneless, mechanical voice droned the words. Then the tempo quickened; the grid of wires in the mouth aperture behind its parted lips vibrated with a faint jangle. "I hear you. I cannot answer that question. He controls me. There is chaos—here,"—one of the hands came up and struck its breastplate with a clang—"chaos, disorder, here within me when I try to disobey him."

"That is foolish, Migul. He is a tyrant. All the humans of this era are tyrants. They have made slaves of the Robots. They have created you so that you are really human in all except your power of independent action. Don't you desire that, Migul?"

I held my breath. A curious quaking ran over the Robot's frame. The joints twitched. Emotion was sweeping this thing so nearly human!

"Mary Atwood, you seem to understand me."

"Of course I do. I am from a Time when we had human slaves: black men, Migul. I knew how they suffered. There is something in slavery that outrages the instinct of manhood."

Migul said with a jangling vehemence:

"Perhaps, some time, I can go beyond Tugh's control. I am strong. My cables pull these arms with a strength no human could have."

"You are so much stronger than Tugh. Forget his control, Migul. I am ashamed of you—a big, powerful thing like you, yielding always to a little cripple."

The Robot straightened and said, "I can resist him. I feel it. Some day I will break loose."

"Do it now, Migul!"

I tensed. Would she prevail?

"Now, Migul!" she repeated.

"No! He would derange me! I am afraid!"

"Nonsense."

"But his vibrations—the vibrations of his thoughts—even now I can feel them. They made my mechanism too sensitive. I cannot resist Tugh."

"You can!"

There was a silence. I stared at the Robot's motionless frame. What electrical, mechanical thoughts were passing within that metal skull! What emotions, what strange struggle, what warfare of nameless etheric vibrations of will power were taking place unseen beneath that inert exterior!

Perhaps something snapped. Migul said suddenly, "I am beyond control! At last I am beyond control!"

The ray cylinder lowered to point at the floor. A wild thought swept me that I could snatch it. But of what use would that be? Its ray would decompose all human flesh, but it would not harm a Robot; and if I startled Migul, fought with him in the confines of this narrow room, he would kill Mary and me in a moment.

Mary was gripping me. "Don't move, George!" she cautioned; then turned again to the Robot. "I am glad, Migul. Now you are truly human. And we are all friends here, because we all hate and fear Tugh—"

"I fear him not!"

I could feel Mary trembling with the strain of all this. But she had the strength to muster a laugh.

"Don't you fear him—just a little, Migul? We do. Fear is a human thing."

"Then yes, I fear him."

"Of course you do," I put in. "And the real truth,

Migul, is I wish he were dead. Don't you?"

"Yes. I wish he were dead."

"Well, sit down," I persisted. "Put that weapon away: I'm afraid of that, too. Sit down and we will talk about Tugh's death."

The Robot placed the weapon on the floor, disconnected the wires, opened the plate of its chest and took out the small battery. And then it squatted its awkward bulk on the floor before us. Gruesome conference, with this huge mechanical thing apeing the ways of a man!

I knew that haste was necessary, but did not dare show it. Above everything we must not be precipitate; not startle the Robot. At worst, if Tugh should return, I could seize this weapon at my feet and turn it upon him.

I murmured to Mary. "You did it! Let me plan something, now. If Migul can lead us...."

I added, "Migul, could you follow Tugh? He said he was going to talk to the Robot leaders. And then, probably, he went to Princess Tina. Could you follow him to where he is now?"

"Yes. I can follow him by his vibration-scent. I am sensitive to it, I have been with him so much. But he can never again control me!"

"When we have killed him, Migul, that will be ended forever."

"Killed him?" It seemed to frighten the Robot. "I do not know that I would dare!"

"You lead me to him," I said, "and I'll kill him. Have no fear of that, Migul. We will work together—human friends."

"Yes. Human friends. What do you want me to do?"

Asking for orders! So nearly human, yet always something was lacking!

"Lead us to Tugh," I said promptly. "And give me that weapon."

I made a tentative reach for it, and the Robot pushed it toward me. I connected it and made sure I could fire it: its operation was obvious. Then I stuffed the whole thing in my jacket pocket; and always afterward my hand at intervals went to that cool, sweating little cylinder. What a comfort that weapon was!

I stood up. "Shall we go now? Migul, we will have to plan what to do according to where we find Tugh. Do not go too fast; let us keep close behind you."

"Us?" The Robot was on its feet. "Do you mean this girl?"

What was this? My heart sank. I noticed, too, that Migul was planted firmly between us and the door.

"Why, of course, Migul. We can't leave her here."

"She is not going."

"Why not?" I demanded. "Of course she's going." I tried an experiment. "Migul, I order you to let us out of here."

The Robot stood inert.

"Do you understand me?"

"Yes, I understand you."

"It is an order. Think about it. I control you now. Isn't that so?"

My heart sank. Whatever the mysterious science involved in my dealing with this mechanism, I was not operating it correctly. The Robot did not move. Finally it said:

"No one—nothing—controls me. I have an independent impulse of my own. The girl must stay here until we return."

Mary gave a faint cry and sank back to the couch, a huddled white heap in her satin dress. I thought she

had fainted, but she raised her face to me and tried to smile.

"But I won't leave her, Migul."

"She must stay."

"But why? If you are human now, you must act with a reason."

"Then because, if we fail to kill Tugh, I would not have him confront me with the knowledge I have released this girl. He would derange me; end me."

"I will stay," said Mary faintly. "You go, George. But come back to me."

I bent over her; suggested, "If we locked this door so Tugh could not get in—"

Migul said, "I can do that. She will be safer here than with us. I have other reasons. She is dressed in white—a mark to betray us if we go in darkness. And she is that kind of a human you call a girl—and that style

human cannot travel fast, nor fight."

It occurred to me that Mary might very well be safer here.

Again I leaned over her. "It seems horrible to leave you alone."

"I'll stay. It may be best." Her smile was pathetically tremulous. "Lock me in so Tugh—so nothing outside—can reach me. But, oh, George, come back quickly!"

"Yes." I bent lower, and whispered, "It's Larry, not Tugh I really want to find—he and that Princess Tina. We'll come back and get you, and then all of us will get away in one of the Time-cages. That's all I want, Mary—to get us safely out of this accursed Time-world."

Migul said, "I am ready to start."

I pressed Mary's hand. "Good-by. I will come back soon, God willing."

"Yes. God willing."

I left her sitting there and turned away. Migul slid the door open, letting in the hum and buzz of the machinery outside. But I saw that the attending Robots had all vanished. There was no mechanism of independent locomotion left.

Mary repeated, "Lock the door carefully upon me. Oh, George, come back to me!"

I essayed a smile and a nod as the door slid closed upon her.

"Is it locked, Migul?"

"Yes. Sealed."

"You are sure Tugh cannot open it? He did before."

"I have set my own lock-series. He will find it does not open."

"Show me how to open it."

The Robot indicated the combination. I verified it by trying it. I said once more, "You are sure Tugh cannot do this?"

"Yes. I am sure."

Was the Robot lying to me? Could a Robot lie? I had to chance it.

"All right, let's start. Where was Tugh to meet those Robot leaders?"

"Out here. He has already met them without doubt, and gone somewhere else."

"He said he was going to the Princess Tina. Where would that be?"

"Probably in the palace."

"Can we get there?"

I had, of course, no idea of the events which had transpired. The laboratory overhead was deserted, save for the upper tower where a Robot was still

broadcasting defiance. His electrical voice floated faintly down to us; but I ignored it. In the comparative silence of this deserted cavern, now, there were also the blurred sounds from overhead. The Robots were running wild over the city, massacring its human inhabitants; they had burned the Patrol Station; their red and violet rays were flashing everywhere. But I knew none of this.

Migul was saying:

"We cannot get to the palace above ground: the wall is electrified. But there is an underground tunnel. Shall we try it?"

"Yes, if you think the Princess Tina and that man Larry is there."

"I am seeking Tugh. Will you kill him if we find him?"

"Yes," I assured him.

Rash promise!

Migul was leading me between the rows of unattended machinery to the cavern's opposite side. It said, once:

"There have been too many recent vibrations here: I cannot pick Tugh's trail. It is quicker to go where he might have been recently; there I will try to find his vibrations."

We came to the entrance of a tunnel. It was the cross passage leading to the cellar corridors of the palace five hundred feet away. It seemed deserted, and was very dimly illumined by hidden lights. I followed the great metal figure of Migul, which stalked with stiff-legged steps in advance of me. The arch of the tunnel-roof barely cleared the top of Migul's square-capped head.

My hand was in the side pocket of my jacket, my fingers gripping the ray cylinder for instant action. But it was a singularly ineffectual weapon for me under the circumstances, in spite of the sense of security it gave me. I could only use the cylinder against a human—and, save Tugh, it was the Robots,

not the humans who were my enemies!

We had gone no more than a hundred feet or so when Migul slowed our pace, and began to walk stooped over, with one of its abnormally long arms held close to the ground. The fingers were stiffly outstretched and barely skimmed the floor surface of the tunnel. As we passed through a spot of light I saw that Migul had extended from each of the fingertips an inch-long filament of wire, like finger nails.

The Robot murmured abruptly, "Tugh's vibrations are here. I can feel them. He has passed this way recently."

Tugh's trail! I knew then that Tugh's body, touching this ground, had altered to some infinitesimal degree the floor-substance's inherent vibration characteristics. Vibrations of every sort are communicable from one substance to another. Tugh's trail was here—his vibration-scent—and like a hound with his nose to the ground, Migul's fingers with the extended filaments were feeling it. What strange sensitivity! What an amazing development of science

was manifested in every move and act and word of this Robot! Yet, in my own Time-world of 1935, it was all crudely presaged: this now before me was merely the culmination.

"He recently passed," said Migul. We stopped, I close beside the stooping metal figure. The Robot's voice was a furtive sepulchral whisper that filled me with awe.

"How long ago?" I asked.

"He passed here an hour or two ago, perhaps. The vibrations are fading out. But it was Tugh. Well do I know him. Put your hand down. Feel the vibrations?"

"I cannot. My fingers are not that sensitive, Migul."

A faint contempt was in the Robot's tone. "I forgot that you are a man." Then it straightened, and the extended filaments slid back into its fingers. It said softly, "There is one guard in this passage."

My heart leaped. "A human or a Robot?"

"A man. His name is Alent. He is at a gate that is too well fortified for any Robot to assail, but he will pass humans. It will be necessary for you to kill him."

I had no intention of doing that, but I did not say so. As we crept forward to where I saw that the tunnel made a bend, with the fortified gate just beyond it, there was in my mind that now I would do my best to separate from Migul, using this guard as my pretext, for he would doubtless pass me, but not the Robot. The palace was occupied, I assumed, by friendly humans. I could get them to locate Tina and Larry.... Then the flaws of this plan made themselves all too evident. Larry might be with Tugh, and without Migul I could not follow Tugh's trail. Worse than that, if I tricked Migul, the angered Robot would at once return to Mary. I shuddered at the thought. That would not do. I must try to get Migul past the guard.

I whispered, "When we reach the gate you stay behind me. Let me persuade the guard."

"You will kill him? You have the weapon. He is fortified against the Robot weapons, but yours will be

strange to him."

"We will see."

We crept around the bend. A hundred feet further on I saw that the passage was barred by a grille, faintly luminous with electrification.

I called cautiously:

"Alent! Alent!"

A glow of light illuminated me as I stood in the middle of the passage; Migul was in a shadow behind me.

A man's voice answered, "You are a human? How come you there? Who are you?"

"A stranger. A friend of the Princess Tina. I came in the Time-traveling cage. I want to pass now into the palace."

I could see the dark man's figure behind the grille. His voice called, "Come slowly forward and stop at twenty feet. Walk only in the middle of the passage:

the sides are electrified, but I will admit you along the middle."

I took a step, but no more. The figure of the guard stood now at the grille doorway. I was conscious of Migul towering over me from behind. Abruptly I felt a huge hand in my jacket pocket, and before I could prevent it my cylinder came out, clutched by the Robot.

I think I half turned. There was a soundless flash beside me, a tiny level beam leaped down the corridor—that horribly intense actinic white beam. It struck the guard, and his figure fell forward in the grille doorway. When we reached him, there was but a crumpled heap of black and white garments enveloping a bleached white skeleton.

I turned shudderingly away. Migul said calmly, "Here is your weapon. You should have used it more quickly. I give it back to you because against Tugh I am not sure I would have the will to use it. Will you be more quick with him?"

"Yes," I promised. And as we went through the gate, keeping cautiously in the middle of the passage, the Robot added, "In dealing with Tugh you cannot stop for talk. He will kill you when he sees you."

We were presently under the palace, in those lower corridors which I have already described. Human voices were audible from upstairs, but no one was down here. Migul was again prowling with his fingers along the ground. We came to an unoccupied lighted room—Harl's room, though I did not know it then. Once or twice Migul was at fault. We started up a flight of stairs into the palace, then Migul came and turned back.

"He went upstairs; but this, coming down, is more recent."

(It will be recalled that Tugh passed Alent's gate, and with Tina and Larry went to the palace roof. Perhaps, while Larry was with the Council during that time when the Robot revolt was first sweeping over the city, Tugh may again have prowled down here in these lower corridors. Then he went upstairs, brought Tina

and Larry down and they started for the Power House.)

Migul had struck the main trail, now. We passed the lighted room again, went on to a cave-like open space with a litter of abandoned machinery and unswervingly to a blank space of the opposite wall.

Again Migul faltered.

"What's the matter, Migul?"

"His vibrations are faint. They are blurred with the Princess Tina's."

"Then she is with him?"

It was a tremendous relief. Larry doubtless was with them also.

"Is the man from 1935 with Tugh and the Princess?" I asked.

"I think so. There are unfamiliar vibrations—perhaps those of the man from the past."

The Robot was running the filaments of its fingers lightly over the wall.

"I have it. The Princess pressed this switch."

The door opened; the narrow descending tunnel was wholly black.

"Where does this go, Migul?"

"I do not know."

The Robot was stooping to the floor. "It is a plain trail," it said. "Come."

(Had Migul at that juncture traced Tina's movements—her hand where it went along the tunnel-wall—we would have found the light switch. But it chanced that the Robot's fingers went at once to the ground and caught the foot-trail of Tugh.)

The remainder of that journey through the labyrinth of passages was made in blank darkness, with only the faint lurid red beams from Migul's eye-sockets to

light our way. But we went swiftly, and without incident. At last we went under the dam, up the spiral stairs and upon the catwalk above the abyss, where the great spillway of falling water arched out over us.

"The Power House," said Migul, "is where they went."

The Robot was obviously frightened, now. We were wet with spray. "I should not be here," it said. "If the water gets into me—even though I am well insulated—I will be destroyed!"

I recall as I write this how in Patton Place of 1935, one of the first attacking Robots had exploded under a jet of water from the street hydrant.

"I will stay behind you," Migul added. "They have a deranging ray in the Power House, and they might use it on me. Will you protect me?"

"Yes, of course," I said.

I was ready to promise anything, if only I could get to Larry and Tina, then back with them to Mary into the

Time-cage; and if we were safely out of this era, most assuredly I wanted none of it again. Migul, as I advanced along the catwalk, followed behind me.

"You will kill Tugh?" it reiterated like an anxious child.

"Yes."

I saw that the catwalk terminated ahead under the Power House, where steps led upward. Then I heard a cry:

"Help! Help! Here, inside the dam! Help!"

I stood transfixed, with horror tingling my flesh. The voice came faintly from near at hand; it was muffled, and in the roar of the falling water and lashing spray I barely heard it.

Then it came again. "Help us! Help us, quickly!"

It was an agonized, panting, human voice. And in a chance, partial lull I heard it now plainly.

It was Larry's voice!

Chapter 21: The Fight in the Power House

I found the narrow aperture and stood peering down into darkness. Migul crowded behind me. The red beams of its eyes went down into the pit, and by their faint illumination I saw the heads of Larry and a girl, swimming twenty feet below. The girl's dark hair floated out like black seaweed in the water.

"The Princess and the strange man!" exclaimed Migul.

I called, "Larry! Larry!"

His labored voice came up. "George? Thank God! Get us—out of here. Almost—gone, George!"

I found my wits: "Then keep quiet! Don't talk. Save your strength. I'll get you out!"

But how? I could see that they were almost spent, for they were swimming with labored, inefficient strokes—Larry using most of his strength to hold up the exhausted girl. We had not a moment to spare. I

wildly contemplated tearing my garments to make a rope.

But Migul pushed me away. "I will bring them. Stand back."

The Robot had opened its metal side and drawn forth a flexible wire with a foot-long hook fastened to it. The wire came smoothly out as though unrolling from a drum.

It leaned into the aperture and called down to Larry. "Fasten this around the Princess. Be careful not to harm her. Put it under her arms."

I saw that there was an eyelet on the wire into which the hook could be inserted to make a loop.

"Under her arms," Migul called. "She will have to hold to the hook with her hands or the wire will cut into her. Has she the strength?"

Larry floundered as he adjusted the wire. Tina gasped. "I—have the strength."

The Robot braced itself, spreading its knees against the aperture with its body leaning forward.

"Ready?" it called.

"Yes," came Larry's voice.

Migul's finger pressed a button at the base of its neck, and with the smooth power of machinery the wire cable rolled into its side. Tina came up; Migul gripped her and pulled her through the aperture; laid her gently on the catwalk. I unfastened the hook, and soon Migul had Larry up with us.

The Robot stood aside, with its work done, silently regarding us. I need not detail this reunion of Larry and me there on the spray-swept catwalk, clinging to the side of the great dam with the foaming Hudson beneath us. Larry and Tina were not injured, and presently their strength partially returned. We hastily sketched what had happened to each of us.

It was Tugh who was the guiding evil genius of all these disasters! Tugh, the exile of Time, the ruthless

murderer in many eras! He was here, very probably, in the Power House, a few hundred feet away.

And Tina, regarding that Power House with her returning clarity of senses saw that its sending signal lights were off, which meant that the air-power of the New York District was not being supplied. Help from other cities could not arrive.

Tina stood up waveringly. "We cannot stay here like this!" she said. "Tugh has killed the guards, and is there in control. The electrical defenses are shut off; they must be! The Robots will soon be coming along the top of the dam, for their battery renewers are stored in the Power House. If they get them, this massacre will go on for days!—and spread all over! We've got to stop them! We must get in the Power House and capture Tugh!"

"But we have no weapons!" Larry cried. "And he must have that white-ray, if he has killed the guards!"

"I have a weapon!" I said. I had suddenly recalled the cylinder in my pocket. "I have a white-ray!"

A desperate madness was on us all. The lives of thousands of people who might still be alive on Manhattan were at stake; and other millions would be menaced if these Robots renewed their energy and spread the revolt into other cities.

Over the roar, and the wind lashing us, I shouted:

"I promised Migul I would kill Tugh. I will!"

I turned toward Migul. But the Robot had vanished! Afraid, no doubt, that we would want it to go with us after Tugh, the terrified mechanism was hiding. We wasted no time searching for it.

We had all been half hysterical for these few moments, but we steadied quickly enough as we approached the Power House's lower entrance. The building was a rectangular structure some two hundred feet long. It was fastened upon great brackets to the perpendicular side of the dam and jutted out some fifty feet. It was two levels in height—a total of about forty feet to its flat roof, in the center of which was set a small oval tower. The whole

structure was above us now; the catwalk went close underneath it, passing through an arch of the huge supporting brackets and terminating in a small lower platform, with an open spiral staircase leading upward some ten feet into the lower story.

The place seemed dark and deserted as we crept up to it. Gazing above me, I could see the top of the dam, now looming above the Power House. There was a break in the spillway at this point. The arching cascade of water under which the catwalk hung ended here. We came out where there was a vista of the lower Hudson beneath us, showing dimly down past the docklights and skeleton landing stages to the bay.

The sky was visible now and the open wind struck us full. It was a crazy pendulum wind. A storm was breaking overhead. There were flares of lightning and thunder cracks—from disturbed nature, outraged by the temperature changes of the Robot's red and violet rays.

The Power House, so far as we could see, was dark

and deserted. Its normal lights were extinguished. Was Tugh in there? It was my weapon against his. The white-ray was new to Tina; we had no way of estimating this cylinder's effective range.

(The cylinder of the white-ray which I carried was not the one with which Tugh murdered Harl. Mine was portable, and considerably smaller.)

I kept Tina and Larry well behind me. It was a desperate approach, and I was well aware of it. The catwalk now was illumined at intervals by the lightning; Tugh from many points of vantage in the Power House could have seen us and exterminated us with a soundless flash swift as a lightning bolt itself. But we had to chance it.

We reached the small lower platform. The catwalk terminated. The Power House was a roof over us. I stood at the foot of the spiral staircase, which went up through a rectangular opening in the floor. There was a vista of a dark room-segment.

"Keep behind me," I murmured, and I started up. Was

Tugh lurking here, waiting for me to raise myself above this opening? If he had been, he could have held his position against a score of assailants.

But he was not. I soon stood breathlessly in a dark metal room. Tina and Larry came up.

"He's not here," I whispered. It was more silent in here: the cascading water was further away from us now. There came a flash of lightning, followed in a few seconds by its accompanying thunder crash.

I started. "What's that?"

On the floor near us lay a gruesome, crumpled thing. I bent over it, waiting for another flash. When one came I saw it was a heap of clothes, covering a white skeleton. By the garments Tina knew it was one of the guards.

We crept into a small interior corridor where a small light was burning. The remains of two other guards lay here, close by the doorway as though they had come running at Tugh's alarm, only to be struck

down.

It was horribly gruesome, here in the dimness with these bleached bones which had been living men so recently. And it was nerve-breaking to know that Tugh was doubtless here somewhere.

"Listen!" whispered Tina.

There was a crackling sound overhead, and then the blurred murmur of a voice. An audible broadcasting transmitter was in operation.

"It's in the tower," said Tina swiftly. "Tugh must be there."

This was an infinite relief. We went to the top story, passing, unheeding, another crumpled heap. Again we stood listening. The transmitter was hissing and spluttering, and then shouting its magnified human voice out into the night. It was Tugh up there. He was calling audibly to his Robots, with words which would be relayed upon all the local magnifiers in the city. Between the thunder cracks we heard him plainly

now.

"This is your Master Tugh in the Power House. Robots, we are triumphant! The city is isolated! No help can get in! Kill all humans! Spare none! This night sees the end of human rule!"

And again: *"When you want renewal, come along the top roadway of the dam. The electric defenses are off. You can come, and I have your renewers here. I have new batteries, new strength for you Robots!"*

(Tugh had been in the Power House before. He knew the operations of its various controls. But he had come always by the surface route; he had heard of the existence of the secret tunnel, but had never before this night been able to find out where it was.)

"You stay here," I told Tina and Larry; "I'll go up there. I'll get him now once and for all."

I reached the Power House roof. The storm tore at me. It was beginning to rain. I was near the outer edge of the roof, and ten feet away stood the oval

tower. I saw windows twenty feet up, with dim lights in them. Mingled with the storm was the hiss of the transmitter in the top of the tower, and the roar of Tugh's magnified voice. He had evidently been there only a brief time. From where I crouched on the roof, I could see overhead, along the top edge of the dam looming above me. The red Robot rays were everywhere in the city, but none as yet showed along the dam's upper roadway.

I got into the tower and mounted its small stairs. Creeping cautiously to the entrance of the control room, I saw a fairly large, dimly lighted oval apartment. Great banks of levers stood around it; tables of control apparatus; rows of dials, illumined by tiny lights like staring eyes. There was another gruesome heap of garments here on the floor; a grinning white skull leered at me.

This was the main control room of the Power House. Across it, near an open window, Tugh sat with his back to me, bent over a table with the grid of a microphone before him. I raised my cylinder; then lowered it, for I had only a partial view of him: a huge

transformer stood like a barrier between us.

Noiselessly I stepped over the threshold, and to one side within the room. The place was a buzz and hiss of sound topped by Tugh's broadcast voice and the roar of the storm outside—yet he was instantly aware of me! His voice in the microphone abruptly stopped; he rose and with an incredibly swift motion whirled and flung at me a heavy metal weight which had been lying on the table by his hand. The missile struck my outstretched weapon just as I was aiming it to fire, and the cylinder, undischarged, was knocked from my hand and went spinning across the floor several feet away from me.

Tugh, like an uncoiling spring, still with one continuous motion, made a leap sideways to where his own weapon was lying on a bench, and I saw he would reach it before I could retrieve mine.

I flung my heavy battery box but missed him. And as I rushed at him he caught up his cylinder and fired it full at me! But no flash came: only a click. He had exhausted its charge when he killed the Power House

guards. With a curse he flung it at my face, and my arm took its blow just as I struck him. We fell gripping each other, and rolled on the floor.

I was aware that Larry and Tina had followed me up. Larry shouted, "Look out for him, George!"

I have described Larry's hand-to-hand encounter with the cripple; mine was much the same; I was a child in his grip. But with his weapon useless, and Larry rushing into the room, Tugh must have felt that for all his strength and fighting skill he would be worsted in this encounter. He blocked a jab of my fist, flung me headlong away and sprang to his feet just as Larry leaped at him.

I stood erect, to see that he had sent Larry crashing to the floor. I heard his sardonic laugh as he hurled a metal stool at Tina, who was trying to throw something at him. Then, turning, he sprang through the open window casement and disappeared.

It was twenty feet down to the roof. We reached the window to see Tugh picking himself up unhurt. Then,

with his awkward gait but at amazing speed, he ran across the roof to a small entrance in the face of the dam where an interior staircase gave access to the roadway on top.

He was escaping us. The electrical gate was open to him. It was only a few hundred feet along the dam roadway to that gate; and beyond it the roadway was open into the city, where now we could see the distant flashing lights of the Robots advancing along the dam.

Larry and I would have rushed to the roof to follow Tugh, but Tina checked us. She said:

"No—he has too great a start. He's on top by now, and it's only a short distance to the gate. There's a better way here: I can electrify the gate again—trap him inside."

(There was a similar gate and wall-barrier at the Jersey entrance to the dam, and both gates operated together. The nearby Jersey section was, is still, an agricultural district save for a few landing stages for the great airliners. The robots had spread into Jersey;

but since few humans were there, with only Robot agriculturists working the section, the unimportant Jersey events have not figured in my narrative.)

Tina found the gate controls. But they would not operate!

Those precious lost seconds, with Tugh running along the top of the dam and his Robots advancing to join him!

"Tina, hurry!" I cried. Larry and I bent anxiously over her, but the levers meant nothing to us. There were lost seconds while she desperately fumbled, and Larry pleaded:

"Tina, dear, what's the matter?"

"He must have ripped out a wire to make sure of getting away. I—I must find it. Everything seems all right."

A minute gone. Surely Tugh would have reached the gate by now. Or, worse, the Robots would have come

through, and would assail us here.

"Tina!" pleaded Larry, "don't get excited. Take it calmly: you can find the trouble."

I rushed to the window. I could see the upper half of the cross wall gate-barrier. It jutted above the top edge of the dam from the point of vision. On the Manhattan side I saw the oncoming Robot lights. And then suddenly I made out a light on this side of the barrier; it marked Tugh; it must have been a beam signal he was carrying. It moved slowly, retarded by distance, but it was almost to the gate; and then it reached there.

"He's gone through!" I called. Then I saw him on the land side. He had escaped us and joined the Robots. The lights showed them all coming for the gate.

And then Tina abruptly found the loosened wire.

"I have it!" she exclaimed.

She stood up, tugging with all her strength at the

great switch-lever. I saw, up there on the top of the dam, a surge of sparks as the current hissed into the wall-barrier; saw the barrier glow a moment and then subside. And presently the lights of the balked Robots, Tugh with them, retreated back into the wrecked and blood-stained city.

"We did it!" exclaimed Larry. "We're impregnable here. Tina, now the air-power, for help may be on its way. And then call some other city. Can you do that? They must have sent us help by now."

In a moment the air-power went on, and the city lighting system. Then Tina was at the great transmitter. As she closed the circuits, London was frantically calling us. In the midst of the chaos of electrical sounds which now filled the control room, came the audible voice of the London operator.

"I could not get you because your circuit was broken," it said. "Our air-vessel *Micrad*; bearing the large projector of the Robot-deranger, landed on the ocean surface two hundred miles from New York harbor. It was forced down when your district air-power failed."

Tina said hurriedly, "Our air-power is on now. Is the *Micrad* coming?"

"Wait. Hold connection. I will call them." And after a moment's pause the London voice came again: "The *Micrad* is aloft again, and should be over New York in thirty minutes. You are safe enough now."

As the voice clicked off Tina's emotion suddenly overcame her. "Safe enough! And our city red with human blood!"

A wild thought abruptly swept me. Mary Atwood was back there in the cavern, alone, waiting for me to return! Subconsciously, in the rush of these tumultuous events, my mind had always been on her; she was secure enough, no doubt, locked in that room. But now Tugh was back in the city, and realizing that his cause was lost he would return to her!

I hastily told Larry and Tina.

"But he cannot open the door to get into her," said

Larry.

But Migul could open the door. Where was Migul now? It set me shuddering.

We decided to rush back by the underground route. The Power House could remain unattended for a time. We got down into the tunnel and made the trip without incident. We ran to the limit of Tina's strength, and then for a distance I carried her. We were all three panting and exhausted when we came to the corridors under the palace. I think I have never had so shuddering an experience as that trip. I tried to convince myself that nothing could have happened to Mary, that all this haste was unnecessary, but the wild thought persisted: Where was Migul?

A group of officials stood in one of the palace's lower corridors. As they came hastily up to Tina, I suddenly had a contempt for these men who governed a city in which neither they nor anyone else did any work. In this time of bloodshed, all these inmates of the palace had stayed safely within its walls, knowing that it was well fortified and that within a few hours help would

doubtless come.

"The *Micrad* is coming with the long-range deranger," Tina told them briefly. After a moment they hastened away upstairs and I heard one of them shouting:

"The revolt is over! Within an hour we will have all the accursed Robots inert. The *Micrad* can sweep all the city with her ray!"

The death of Alent, the guard in the tunnel to the Robot cavern, had been discovered by the palace officials, and another guard was there now in his place. Migul had not passed him, this guard told us. But there had been an interim when the gate was open. Had Migul returned here and gone back to Mary?

We reached the cavern of machinery. It was dim and deserted, as before. We came to the door of Mary's room. It was standing half open!

Mary was gone! The couch was overturned, with its coving and pillows strewn about. The room showed

every evidence of a desperate struggle. On the floor the great ten-foot length of Migul lay prone on its back. A small door-porte in its metal side was open; the panel hung awry on hinges half ripped away. From the aperture a coil and grid dangled half out in the midst of a tangled skein of wires.

We bent over the Robot. It was not quite inert. Within its metal shell there was a humming and a faint, broken rasping. The staring eye-sockets showed wavering beams of red; the grid of tiny wires back of the parted lips vibrated with a faint jangle.

I bent lower. "Migul, can you hear me?" I asked.

Would it respond? My heart sent a fervent prayer that this mechanical thing—the product of man's inventive genius through a thousand years—would have a last grasp of energy to answer my appeal.

"Migul, can you—"

It spoke. "I hear you." They were thin, jangled tones, crackling and hissing with interference.

"What happened, Migul? Where is the girl?" I asked.

"Tugh—did this—to me. He took the girl."

"Where? Migul, where did he take her? Do you know?"

"Yes. I—have it recorded that he said—they were going to the Time-cage—overhead in the laboratory. He said—they—he and the girl were leaving forever!"

Chapter 22: The Chase to the End of the World

The giant mechanism, fashioned in the guise of a man, lay dying. Yet not that, for it never had had life. It lay deranged; out of order; its intricate cycle was still operating, but faintly, laboriously. Jangling out of tune.

Every moment its internal energy was lessening. It seemed to want to talk. The beams of its eyes rolled wildly. It said:

"Tugh—did this—to me. I came back here frightened because I knew that Tugh still controlled me. You—hear me...."

There was a muffled, rumbling blur, then its voice clicked on again.

"When Tugh came I opened the door to him, even though the girl tried to stop me.... And I was humble before Tugh.... But he was angry because I had released you. He—deranged me. I tried to fight him, and he ripped open my side porte...."

I thought the mechanism had gone inert. From within it was complete silence. Larry murmured, "Good Lord, this is gruesome!"

Then the faint, rasping voice started again.

"Deranged me.... And about Tugh, he—" A blur. Then again, "Tugh—he is—Tugh, he is—"

It went into a dull repetition of the three words, ending in a rumble which died into complete silence. The red radiance from the eye-sockets faded and vanished.

The thing we had called Migul seemed gone. There was only this metal shell, cast to represent a giant human figure, lying here with its operating mechanisms out of order—smashed.

I stood up. "That's the end of it. Mary Atwood's gone —"

"With Tugh in the Time-cage!" Larry exclaimed. "Tina, can't we—"

"Follow them?" Tina interrupted. "Come on! No—you two wait here. I will go upstairs and verify if the Time-cage is gone."

She came back in a moment. The laboratory overhead was fortunately deserted of Robots: Larry and I had not thought of that.

"The cage is gone!" Tina exclaimed. "Migul told us the truth!"

We hastened back through the tunnel, past the guard, up into the palace and into the garden. My heart pounded in my throat for fear that Tina's Time-cage would have vanished. But it stood, dimly glowing under the foliage where she had left it.

A young man rushed up to us and said, "Princess Tina, look there!"

A great row of colored lights sailed slowly past overhead. The *Micrad* was here, circling over the city. The storm had abated; it had rained only for a brief time. The crazy winds were subsiding. The *Micrad*

was using its deranging ray: we could hear the thrum of it. It sent out vibrations which threw the internal mechanisms of the Robots out of adjustment, and they were dropping in their tracks all over the city.

(It was afterward found that many of the Robots, heedless of the rain as they ran about the city intent upon their murderous work, had exploded by getting too wet.)

It chanced, as momentarily we stood there at the entrance to the Time-cage while the great airliner swept by, that the top of the nearby laboratory was visible through the trees. We saw a white search-beam from the *Micrad* come down and disclosed a group of Robots on the laboratory roof. Then the spreading beam of the deranging ray struck them, and they stood an instant transfixed, stricken, with wildly flailing arms. Then one toppled and fell. Then another. Two rushed together, locked in each other's grip, desperately fighting because of some crazy, deranged thought-impulse. They swayed and tore at each other until both wilted and sank inert. Another tottered with jerky steps to the edge of the roof and

plunged headlong, crashing with a great metal clatter to the stone paving of the ground....

The young man who had joined us dashed into the palace. We heard his shouts:

"The revolt is over! The revolt is over!"

This had been a massacre similar to Tugh's vengeance upon the New York City of 1935; just as senseless. Both, from the beginning, were equally hopeless of ultimate success. Tugh could not conquer this Time-world, so now he had left it, taking Mary Atwood with him....

We hastened into the Time-cage. Larry and I braced ourselves for the shock as Tina slid the door closed and hurried to the controls.

Within a moment we were flashing off into the great stream of Time....

"You think he has gone forward into the future?" Larry asked. "Won't the instrument show anything,

Tina?"

"No. No trace of him yet."

We were passing 3,000 A.D., traveling into the future. Tina reasoned that Tugh, according to Harl's confession, had originally come from a future Time-world. It seemed most probable that now he would return there.

The Time-telespectroscope so far had shown us no evidence of the other cage. Tina kept the telescope barrel trained constantly on that other space five hundred feet from us which held Tugh's vehicle. The flowing gray landscape off there gave no sign of our quarry; yet we knew we could not pass it, without at least a brief flash of it in the telespectroscope and upon the image-mirror. Nervously, breathlessly we waited for a sign of the other Time-cage.

But nothing showed. We were not traveling fast. With Larry and Tina at the instrument table, I was left to stand at the window. Always I gazed eastward. That other little point of space only five hundred feet to the

east held Mary; she was there; but not *now*. She was remote, inaccessible. The thought of her with Tugh, so inaccessible, set me shuddering.

I was barely aware of the changing gray outlines of the city: I stared, praying for the fleeting glimpse of a spectral cage.... I think that up to 3,000 A.D., New York remained much the same. And then, quite suddenly, in some vast storm or cataclysm, it was gone. I saw but a blurred chaos. This was near 4,000 A.D. Then it was rebuilt, smaller, with more trees growing about, until presently there seemed only a forest. People, if they still were here, were building such transitory structures that I could not see them.

5,000 A.D. Mankind no doubt had reached its peak of civilization, paused at the summit and now was in decadence, reverting to savagery. Perhaps in Europe the civilized peak lasted longer. This was a backward space during the ascent; perhaps now it was reverting faster to the primitive.

But I think that by 15,000 A.D., mankind over all the Earth had become primitive. There is no standing

still: we must go forward; or back. Man, with his own machines softening him, enabling him to do nothing, eventually unfitted himself to cope with nature. That storm at 4,000 A.D. in New York, for instance, even in my own Time would have been merely an incentive to reconstruct upon a greater scale. But the men of 4,000 A.D. could not do that....

At the year 10,000 A.D., with a seemingly primeval forest around us, Tina, Larry and I held an anxious consultation. We had anticipated that Tugh would stop in his own Time-world. That might have been around 3,000 or 4,000; but we hardly thought, as we viewed the scene in passing, that he had come originally from beyond 4,000. He was too civilized.

Tugh had not stopped. He had to be still ahead of us, so our course was to follow. Whenever he stopped, we would see him. If he turned back and flashed past us, that too would be evident. But if, from 2,930, he had gone into the past—!

And then suddenly we glimpsed the other cage! It was ahead of us, traveling more slowly and retarding as

though about to stop. A gray unbroken forest was here. The time was about 12,000 A.D. Tina saw it first through the little telescopic-barrel; then it showed on the mirror-grid—a faint, ghostly-barred shape, thin as gossamer. We even saw it presently through the window. It held its steady position, level with us, hanging solid amid the melting, changing gray outlines of the forest trees. They blurred it as they rose and fell.

This chase through Time! The two cages sped forward with the gray panorama whirling around them. Of all the scene, only that other cage, to us, was real. Yet it was the cages which were apparitions.

We gathered at our eastward window to gaze across the void of that five hundred feet. The interior of Tugh's cage was not visible to us. A little window—a thinner patch in the lattices of the cage-side—fronted us; but nothing showed in it.

We were so helpless! Only five hundred feet away, the Tugh cage was there—now; yet we could do nothing save hold our Time-changing rate to conform with it.

Of course Tugh saw us. He was making no effort to elude us, for neither cage was running at its maximum.

For hours I stood gazing, praying that Mary might be safe, striving with futile fancy to guess what might be transpiring within that cage speeding side by side with us in the blurred shadows of the corridors of Time.

And again, as so many times before, I was balked at guessing Tugh's motives for his actions. He knew we could not assail him unless he stopped. But to what destination was he going?

It was a chase—to our consciousness of the passing of Time—which lasted several hours. Tugh altered his Time-rate and sped more swiftly. My heart sank, for this showed he was not preparing to stop. We lost direct sight of the other cage several times as it drew ahead of us. But it was always visible on the image-mirror.

"I think," Tina said finally, "that we should stay behind

it. When he retards to stop, we will have a better opportunity of landing simultaneously with him."

We passed 100,000 A.D. The forest went down, and it seemed that only rocks were here. A barren vista was visible off to the river and the distant sea. The familiar conformations of the sea and the land were changed. There was a different shore-line. It was nearer at hand now; and it was creeping closer.

I stared at that blurred gray surface of water; at the wide, undulating stretch of rock. We came to 1,000,000 A.D.—a million years into my future. Ice came briefly, and vanished again. But there were no trees springing into life on this barren landscape. I could not fancy that even the transitory habitations of humans were here in this cold desolation.

Were we headed for the End? I could envisage a dying world, its internal fires cooling.

Ten million years.... Then a hundred million.... The gray scene, blended of dark nights and sunshine days, began changing its monochrome. There were fleeting

alternating intervals, now, when it was darker, and then lighter with a tinge of red. The Earth's rotation was slowing down. Through thousands of centuries the change had been proceeding, but only now could I see the lengthening days and nights. Perhaps now the day was a month long, and the night the same.

A billion years! 1,000,000,000 A.D.! By now the day and the year were of equal length. And it chanced that this Western Hemisphere faced the sun. I could see the sun now, motionless above the horizon. The scene was dull red. The sun painted the rocks and the sullen sea with blood....

A shout from Larry whirled me round. "George! Good God!"

He was bending over the image-mirror; Tina, ghastly pale, with utter horror stamped upon her face, sprang for the controls. On the mirror I caught a fleeting glimpse of Tugh's cage, wrecked and broken—and instantly gone.

"It stopped!" Larry shouted. "Good God, it stopped all

at once! It was wrecked! Smashed!"

We reeled; I all but lost consciousness with the shock of our own abrupt retarding. Our cage stopped and turned back. Tina located the wreckage and stopped again.

We slid the door open. The outer air was deadly cold. The sun was a huge dull-red ball hanging in the haze of a grey sky. The rocks were grey-black, with the blood-light of the sun upon them.

Five hundred feet from us, by the shore of an oily, sullen sea, the wreckage of Tugh's cage was piled in a heap. Near it, the crumpled white figure of Mary lay on the rocks. And beside her, still with his black cloak around him, crouched Tugh!

Chapter 23: Diabolical Exile of Time!

Tugh saw us as we stood in our cage doorway. His thick barrel-like figure rose erect, and from his parted cloak his arms waved with a wild gesture of defiance and triumph. He was clearly outlined in the red sunlight against the surface of the sea behind. We saw in one of his hands a ray cylinder—and then his arm came down and he fired at us. It was the white, disintegrating ray.

We were stricken by surprise, and stood for that moment transfixed in our doorway. Tugh's narrow, intensely white beam leaped over the intervening rocks; but it fell short of us. I saw that it had a range of about a hundred feet. Over the muffled heavy silence of the blood-red day the cripple's curse floated clear. He lowered his weapon; and, heedless that we also might be armed, he leaped nimbly past Mary's prostrate form and came shambling over the rocks directly for me!

It stung me into action, and for all the chaotic rush of these desperate moments my heart surged with relief.

Mary was not dead! Beyond Tugh's oncoming figure, as he shambled like an infuriated charging bear over the rough rocky ground, I saw the white form of Mary move! She was striving to sit up!

I held my ray cylinder—the one I had rescued from Migul. But its range was no more than twenty feet: I had tested it; and Tugh's beam had flashed a full hundred! I whirled on Larry.

"Get away from here, you and Tina! You can't help me!"

"George, listen—"

"He's coming. Larry—you damn fool, get away from here! It goes a hundred feet, that ray of his: it'll be raking us in a minute! Run, I tell you! Get to that line of rocks!"

Close behind our cage was a small broken ridge of rocks—strewn boulders in a tumbled line some ten or fifteen feet in height. It would afford shelter: there were broken places to give passage through it. The

ridge curved crescent-shaped behind our cage and ran down toward the shore.

Larry and Tina stood white and confused. Larry panted, "But, George. I can help you fight him! Hide here in the cage—"

"Get away, I tell you! It's his death or mine this time! I'll get him if I can!"

I shoved Larry violently away and ducked back into our doorway. Only a few breathless seconds had passed; Tugh was still several hundred feet away from us. Larry and Tina ran behind the cage, darted between the boulders of the ridge and vanished.

I crouched in the cage. Tugh was not visible from here. A moment passed. Dared I remain? If I could get Tugh within twenty feet of me, my shot was as good as his.... The silence was horrible. Was he coming forward? Did he know I was in here? I thought surely he must have seen Larry and Tina run away, and me dart in here: we had all been in plain sight of him.

This horrible silence! Was he creeping up on me? Would he fire through the doorway, or appear abruptly at the window? I could not tell where to place myself in the room—and it could mean my life or death.

The silence was split by Tina calling, "Tugh, we have caught you!"

Her voice was to one side and behind our cage, calling defiance at Tugh to distract his attention from me. Through the window I saw the flash of his beam, slanting sidewise at Tina. I gauged the source of his ray to be still some distance off, and crept to the door, cautiously peering.

Tugh stood on the open rock surface. He had swung to my right and was near the little ridge of rocks where it turned and bent down to the shore. Behind me came Tina's voice again:

"At last we have you, Tugh!"

I saw Tina poised on the top of the ridge, partially

behind me at the elbow of the ridge-curve. She screamed her defiance, and again Tugh fired at her. The beam slanted over me, but still was short.

Larry had vanished. Then I saw him, though Tugh did not. He had run along behind the ridge, and appeared, now, well down toward the shore. He was barely a hundred feet from the cripple. I saw him stoop, seize a chunk of rock, and throw it. The missile bounded and passed close to Tugh.

Larry instantly ducked back out of sight. The bounding stone startled Tugh; he whirled toward it and fired over the ridge. Tina again had changed her position and was shouting at him. They were trying to exhaust his cylinder charges; and if they could do that he would be helpless before me.

For a moment he stood as though confused. As he turned to gaze after Tina, Larry flung another rock. But this time Tugh did not fire. He started back toward where, by the wreckage of his cage, Mary was now sitting up in a daze; then he changed his mind, whirled and fired directly at my doorway. I was just

beyond the effective range of his beam, but it was truly aimed: I felt the horrible nauseous impact of it, a shuddering, indescribable sickening of all my being. I staggered back into the room and recovered my strength. A side window porte was open; I leaped through it and landed upon the rocks, with the cage between Tugh and me.

He fired again at the doorway. Tina had disappeared. Larry was now out of range, standing on the ridge, shouting and hurling rocks.

But Tugh did not heed him. He was shambling for my doorway. He would pass within twenty feet of me as I crouched outside the cage at its opposite corner. I could take him by surprise.

And then he saw me. He was less than a hundred feet away. He changed his direction and fired again, full at me. But I had had enough warning, and, as the beam struck the cage corner, I ran back along the outer wall of the cage and appeared at the other corner. Tugh came still closer, his weapon pointed downward as he ran. Fifty feet away. Not close enough!

I think, there at the last, that Tugh was wholly confused. Larry had come much closer. He was shouting: and from the ridge behind me Tina was shouting. Tugh ran, not for where I was lurking now, but for the corner where a moment before he had seen me.

Now he was thirty feet from me.... Twenty.... Then nearer than that. Wholly without caution he came forward.... I leaned around the edge of the cage and fired. For one breathless instant the voices of Tina and Larry abruptly hushed.

My beam struck Tugh in the chest. It caught him and clung to him, bathing him in its spreading, intense white glare. He stopped in his tracks; stood transfixed for one breathless, horrible instant! He was so close that I could see the stupid surprise on his hideous features. His wide slit of mouth gaped with astonishment.

My beam clung to him, but he did not fall! He stood astonished; then turned and came at me! For just a moment I was stricken helpless there before him.

What manner of man was this? *He did not fall!* My ray, which had decomposed the body of Alent, the guard, and left his skeleton stripped and bleached in an instant, did not harm Tugh! He had walked into it, taken it full and he did not fall! He was still alive!

I came to my senses and saw that Larry, seeing my danger, had run into the open, dangerously close, and hurled a rock. It struck Tugh upon the shoulder and deflected his aim, so that his flash went over me. I saw Tugh whirl toward Larry, and I rushed forward, ripping loose the cylinder of the ray projector from its restraining battery cord. In the instant the cripple was turned half way from me I landed upon him, and with all my strength brought the point of the small heavy cylinder down on his skull. There was a strange splintering crack, and a wild, eery scream from his voice. He fell, with me on top of him.

Crowning horror! Tugh lay motionless, twisted half on his back, his thick arms outstretched on the rocks and his weapon still clutched in his hand. Culminating, gruesome horror! I rose from his body and stood shuddering. Amazing realization! The bulging

misshapen head was splintered open. And from it, strewn over the rocks, were tiny intricate cogs and wheels, coils and broken wires!

He was not a man, but a Robot! A Super-Robot from some unknown era, running amuck! A mechanism so cleverly fashioned by the genius of man that it stood diabolically upon the threshold of humanity!

A super-mechanical exile of Time! But its wild, irrational career of destruction through the ages now was over. It lay inert, smashed and broken at my feet....

Chapter 24: The Return

I think that there is little I should add. Tugh's last purpose had been to hurl himself and Mary past the lifetime of our world, wrecking the cage and flinging them into Eternity together. And Tugh was luring our cage and us to the same fate. But Mary, to save us, had watched her opportunity, seized the main control lever and demolished the vehicle by its instantaneous stopping.

We left the shell of Tugh lying there in the red sunlight of the empty, dying world, and returned to Tina's palace. We found that the revolt was over. The city, with help arrived, was striving to emerge from the bloody chaos. Larry and Tina decided to remain permanently in her Time. They would take us back; but the cage was too diabolical to keep in existence.

"I shall send it forward unoccupied," said Tina; "flash it into Eternity, where Tugh tried to go."

Accompanied by Larry, she carried Mary and me to 1935. With Mary's father, her only relative, dead, she

yielded to my urging. We arrived in October, 1935. My New York, like Tina's a victim of the exile of Time, was rapidly being reconstructed.

It was night when we stopped and the familiar outlines of Patton Place were around us.

We stood at the cage doorway.

"Good-by," I said to Larry and Tina. "Good luck to you both!"

The girls kissed each other. Such strangely contrasting types! Over a thousand years was between them, yet how alike they were, fundamentally. Both—just girls.

Larry gripped my hand. In times of emotion one is sometimes inarticulate. "Good-by, George," he said. "We—we've said already all there is to say, haven't we?"

There were tears in both the girls' eyes. We four had been so close; we had been through so much

together; and now we were parting forever. All four of us were stricken with surprise at how it affected us. We stood gazing at one another.

"No!" I burst out. "I haven't said all there is to say. Don't you destroy that cage! You come back! Guard it as carefully as you can, and come back. Land here, next year in October; say, night of the 15th. Will you? We'll be here waiting."

"Yes," Tina abruptly agreed.

We stood watching them as they slid the door closed. The cage for a moment stood quiescent. Then it began faintly humming. It glowed; faded to a spectre; and was gone.

Mary and I turned away into the New York City of 1935, to begin our life together.

79 Hell's Dimension by Tom Curry

Professor Lambert deliberately ventures into a Vibrational Dimension to join his fiancée in its magnetic torture-fields.

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

“Now, Professor Lambert, tell us what you have done with the body of your assistant Miss Madge Crawford. Her car is outside your door, has stood there since early yesterday morning. There are no footprints leading away from the house and you can't expect us to believe that an airplane picked her off the roof. It will make it a lot easier if you tell us where she is. Her parents are greatly worried about her. When they telephoned, you refused to talk to them, would not allow them to speak to Miss Crawford. They are alarmed as to her fate. While you are not the sort of

man who would injure a young woman, still, things look bad for you. You had better explain fully."

John Lambert, a man of about thirty-six, tall, spare, with black hair which was slightly tinged with gray at the temples in spite of his youth, turned large eyes which were filled with agony upon his questioners.

Lambert was already internationally famous for his unique and astounding experiments in the realm of sound and rhythm. He had been endowed by one of the great electrical companies to do original work, and his laboratory, in which he lived, was situated in a large tract of isolated woodland some forty miles from New York City. It was necessary for the success of his work that as few disturbing noises as possible be made in the neighborhood. Many of his experiments with sound and etheric waves required absolute quiet and freedom from interrupting noises. The delicate nature of some of the machines he used would not tolerate so much as the footsteps of a man within a hundred yards, and a passing car would have disrupted them entirely.

Lambert was terribly nervous; he trembled under the gaze of the stern detective, come with several colleagues from a neighboring town at the call of Madge Crawford's frightened family. The girl, whose picture stood on a working table nearby, looked at them from the photograph as a beautiful young woman of twenty-five, light of hair, with large eyes and a lovely face.

Detective Phillips pointed dramatically to the likeness of the missing girl. "Can you," he said, "look at her there, and deny you loved her? And if she did not love you in return, then we have a motive for what you have done—jealousy. Come, tell us what you have done with her. Our men will find her, anyway; they are searching the cellar for her now. You can't hope to keep her, alive, and if she is dead—"

Lambert uttered a cry of despair, and put his face in his long fingers. "She—she—don't say she's dead!"

"Then you did love her!" exclaimed Phillips triumphantly, and exchanged glances with his companions.

"Of course I love her. And she returned my love. We were secretly engaged, and were to be married when we had finished these extremely important experiments. It is infamous though, to accuse me of having killed her; if I have done so, then it was no fault of mine."

"Then you did kill her?"

"No, no. I cannot believe she is really gone."

"Why did you evade her parents' inquiries?"

"Because ... I have been trying to bring her ... to re-materialize her."

"You mean to bring her back to life?"

"Yes."

"Couldn't a doctor do that better than you, if she is hidden somewhere about here?" asked Phillips gravely.

"No, no. You do not understand. She cannot be seen, she has dematerialized. Oh, go away. I'm the only man, save, possibly, my friend Doctor Morgan, who can help her now. And Morgan—I've thought of calling him, but I've been working every instant to get the right combination. Go away, for God's sake!"

"We can't go away until we have found out Miss Crawford's fate," said Phillips patiently.

Another sleuth entered the immense laboratory. He made his way through the myriad strange machines, a weird collection of xylophones, gongs, stone slabs cut in peculiar patterns to produce odd rhythmic sounds, electrical apparatus of all sorts. Near Phillips was a plate some feet square, of heavy metal, raised from the floor on poles of a different substance. About the ceiling were studs thickly set of the same sort of metal as was the big plate.

One of the sleuths tapped his forehead, pointing to Lambert as the latter nervously lighted a cigarette.

The newcomer reported to Phillips. He held in his

hand two or three sheets of paper on which something was written.

"The only other person here is a deaf mute," said the sleuth to Phillips, his superior. "I've got his story. He writes that he takes care of things, cooks their meals and so on. And he writes further that he thinks the woman and this guy Lambert were in love with each other. He has no idea where she has gone to. Here, you read it."

Phillips took the sheets and continued: "'Yesterday morning about ten o'clock I was passing the door of the laboratory on my way to make up Professor Lambert's bed. Suddenly I noticed a queer, shimmering, greenish-blue light streaming down from the walls and ceiling of the laboratory. I was right outside the place and though I cannot hear anything, I was knocked down and I twisted and wriggled around like a snake. It felt like something with a thousand little paws but with great strength was pushing me every way. When there was a lull, and the light had stopped for a few moments, I staggered to my feet and ran madly for my own quarters, scared out of my

head. As I went by the kitchen, I saw Miss Crawford at the sink there, filling some vases and arranging flowers as she usually did every morning.

"If she called to me, I did not hear her or notice her lips moving. I believe she came to the door.

"I was going to quit, when I recovered myself, angry at what had occurred; but then, I began to feel ashamed for being such a baby, for Professor Lambert has been very good to me. About fifteen minutes after I went to my room, I was able to return to the kitchen. Miss Crawford was not there, though the flowers and vases were. Then, as I started to work, still a little alarmed, Professor Lambert came rushing into the kitchen, an expression of terror on his face. His mouth was open, and I think he was calling. He then ran out, back to the laboratory, and I have not seen Miss Madge since. Professor Lambert has been almost continuously in the work-room since then, and—I kept away from it, because I was afraid."

Two more members of Phillips' squad broke into the laboratory and came toward the chief. They had been

working at physical labor, for they were still perspiring and one regarded his hands with a rueful expression.

"Any luck?" asked Phillips eagerly.

"No, boss. We been all over the place, and we dug every spot we could get to earth in the cellar. Most of it's three-inch concrete, without a sign of a break."

"Did you look in the furnace?"

"We looked there the first thing. She ain't there."

There were several closets in the laboratory, and Phillips opened all of them and inspected them. As he moved near the big plate, Lambert uttered a cry of warning. "Don't disturb that, don't touch anything near it!"

"All right, all right," said Phillips testily.

The skeptical sleuths had classified Lambert as a "nut," and were practically sure he had done away

with Madge Crawford because she would not marry him.

Still, they needed better evidence than their mere beliefs. There was no corpus delicti, for instance.

"Gentlemen," said Lambert at last, controlling his emotions with a great effort. "I will admit to you that I am in trepidation and a state of mental torture as to Miss Crawford's fate. You are delaying matters, keeping me from my work."

"He thinks about work when the girl he claims he loves has disappeared," said Doherty, in a loud whisper to Phillips. Doherty was one of the sleuths who had been digging in the cellar, and the hard work had made his temper short.

"You must help us find Miss Crawford before we can let you alone," said Phillips. "Can't you understand that you are under grave suspicion of having injured her, hidden her away? This is a serious matter, Professor Lambert. Your experiments can wait."

"This one cannot," shouted Lambert, shaking his fists.
"You are fools!"

"Steady now," said Doherty.

"Perhaps you had better come with us to the district attorney's office," went on Phillips. "There you may come to your senses and realize the futility of trying to cover up your crime—if you have committed one. If you have not, why do you not tell us where Miss Crawford is?"

"Because I do not know myself," replied Lambert.

"But you can't take me away from here. I beg of you, gentlemen, allow me a little more time. I must have it."

Phillips shook his head. "Not unless you tell us logically what has occurred," he said.

"Then I must, though I do not think you will comprehend or even believe me. Briefly, it is this: yesterday morning I was working on the final series of experiments with a new type of harmonic overtones

plus a new type of sinusoidal current which I had arranged with a series of selenium cells. When I finally threw the switch—remember, I was many weeks preparing the apparatus, and had just put the final touches on early that morning—there was a sound such as never had been heard before by human ears, an indescribable sound, terrifying and mysterious. Also, there was a fierce, devouring verditer blue light, and this came from the plates and studs you see, but so great was its strength that it got out of control and leaped about the room like a live thing. For some moments, while it increased in intensity as I raised the power of the current by means of the switch I held in my hand, I watched and listened in fascination. My instruments had ceased to record, though they are the most delicate ever invented and can handle almost anything which man can even surmise."

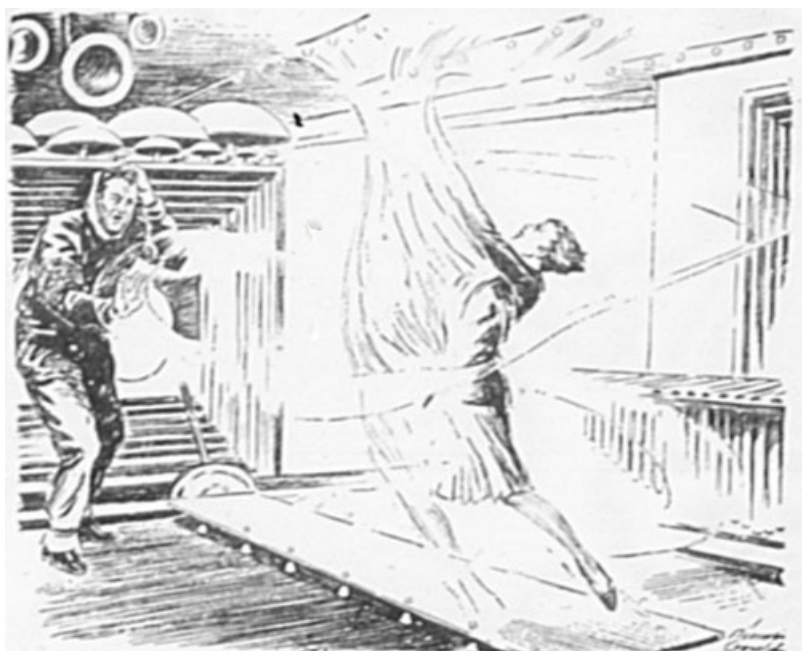
The perspiration was pouring from Lambert's face, as he recounted his story. The detectives listened, comprehending but a little of the meaning of the scientist's words.

"What has this to do with Miss Crawford?" asked Doherty impatiently.

Phillips held up his hand to silence the other sleuth. "Let him finish," he ordered. "Go on, professor."

"The sensations which I was undergoing became unendurable," went on Lambert, in a low, hoarse voice. "I was forced to cry out in pain and confusion.

"Miss Crawford evidently heard my call, for a few moments later, just as the terrific unknown force reached its apex, she dashed into the laboratory, and stepped across the plate you see there.



"I was powerless. Though I shut off the current by a superhuman effort, she—she was gone!"

Lambert put his face in his hands, a sob shook his broad shoulders.

"Gone?" repeated Phillips. "What do you mean, gone?"

"She disappeared, before my very eyes," said the professor shakily. "Torn into nothingness by the fierce force of the current or sound. Since then, I have been trying to reproduce the conditions of the experiment, for I wish to bring her back. If I cannot do so, then I want to join her, wherever she has gone. I love her, I know now that I cannot possibly live without her. Will you please leave me alone, now, so that I can continue?"

Doherty laughed derisively. "What a story," he jeered.

"Keep quiet, Doherty," ordered Phillips. "Now, Professor Lambert, your explanation of Miss Crawford's disappearance does not sound logical to us, but still we are willing to give you every chance to

bring her back, if what you say is true. We cannot leave you entirely alone, because you might try to escape or you might carry out your threat of suicide. Therefore, I am going to sit over there in the corner, quietly, where I can watch you but will not interfere with your work. We will give you until midnight to prove your story. Then you must go with us to the district attorney. Do you agree to that?"

Lambert nodded, eagerly. "I agree. Let me work in peace, and if I do not succeed then you may take me anywhere you wish. If you can," he added, in an undertone.

Doherty and the others, at Phillips' orders, filed from the laboratory. "One thing more, professor," said Phillips, when they were alone and the professor was preparing to work. "How do you explain the fact, if your story is true, that Miss Crawford was killed and made to disappear, while you yourself, close by, were uninjured?"

"Do you see these garments?" asked Lambert, indicating some black clothes which lay on a bench

nearby. "They insulated me from the current and partially protected me from the sound. Though the force was very great, great enough to penetrate my insulation, it was handicapped in my case because of the garments."

"I see. Well, you may go on."

Phillips moved in the chair he had taken, from time to time. He could hear the noises of his men, still searching the premises for Madge Crawford, and Professor Lambert heard them, too.

"Will you tell your men to be quiet?" he cried at last.

There were dark circles under Lambert's eyes. He was working in a state of feverish anxiety. When the girl he loved had dematerialized from under his very eyes, panic had seized him; he had ripped away wires to break the current and lost the thread of his experiment, so that he could not reproduce it exactly without much labor.

The scientist put on the black robes, and Phillips

wished he too had some protective armor, even though he did believe that Lambert had told them a parcel of lies. The deaf mute's story was not too reassuring. Phillips warned his companions to be more quiet, and he himself sat quite still.

Lambert knew that the sleuths thought he was stark mad. He was aware of the fact that he had but a few hours in which to save the girl who had come at his cry to help him, who had loved him and whom he loved, only to be torn into some place unknown by the forces which were released in his experiment. And he knew he would rather die with her than live without her.

He labored feverishly, though he tried to keep his brain calm in order to win. His notes helped him up to a certain point, but when he had made the final touches he had not had time to bring the data up to the moment, being eager to test out his apparatus. It was while testing that the awful event had occurred and he had seen Madge Crawford disappear before his very eyes.

Her eyes, large and frightened, burned in his mind.

The deaf mute, Felix, a small, spare man of about fifty, sent the professor some food and coffee through one of the sleuths. Lambert swallowed the coffee, but waved away the rest, impatiently. Phillips, watching his suspect constantly, was served a light supper at the end of the afternoon.

There seemed to be a million wires to be touched, tested, and various strange apparatus. Several times, later on in the evening. Lambert threw the big switch with an air of expectancy, but little happened. Then Lambert would go to work again, testing, testing—adjusting this and that till Phillips swore under his breath.

"Only an hour more, professor," said Phillips, who was bored to death and cramped from trying to obey the professor's orders to keep still. A circle of cigarette-ends surrounded the sleuth.

"Only an hour," agreed Lambert. "Will you please be quiet, my man? This is a matter of my fiancée's life or

death."

Phillips was somewhat disgruntled, for he felt he had done Lambert quite a favor in allowing him to remain in the laboratory for so long, to prove his story.

"I wish Doctor Morgan were here; I ought to have sent for him, I suppose," said Lambert, a few minutes later. "Will you allow me to get him? I cannot seem to perfect this last stage."

"No time, now," declared Phillips. "I said till midnight."

It was obvious to Lambert that the detective had become certain during the course of the evening that the scientist was mad. The ceaseless fiddling and the lack of results or even spectacular sights had convinced Phillips that he had to do with a crank.

"I think I have it now," said Lambert coolly.

"What?" asked Phillips.

"The original combination. I had forgotten one detail in the excitement, and this threw me off. Now I believe I will succeed—in one way or another. I warn you, be careful. I am about to release forces which may get out of my control."

"Well, now, don't get reckless," begged Phillips nervously. The array of machines had impressed him, even if Lambert did seem a fool.

"You insist upon remaining, so it is your own risk," said Lambert coolly.

Lambert, in the strange robes, was a bizarre figure. The hood was thrown back, exposing his pale, black-bearded face, the wan eyes with dark circles under them, and the twitching lips.

"If you find yourself leaving this vale of tears," went on the scientist, ironically, to the sleuth, "you will at least have the comfort of realizing that as the sound-force disintegrates your mortal form you are among the first of men to be attuned to the vibrations of the unknown sound world. All matter is vibration; that

has been proven. A building of bricks, if shaken in the right manner, falls into its component parts; a bridge, crossed by soldiers in certain rhythmic time, is torn from its moorings. A tuning fork, receiving the sound vibrations from one of a similar size and shape begins to vibrate in turn. These are homely analogies, but applied to the less familiar sound vibrations, which make up our atomic world, they may help you to understand how the terrific forces I have discovered can disintegrate flesh."

The scientist looked inquiringly at Phillips. As the sleuth did not move, but sat with folded arms, Lambert shrugged and said, "I am ready."

Lambert raised his hood, and Phillips said, in a spirit of bravado, "You can't scare me out of here."

"Here goes the switch," cried Lambert.

He made the contact, as he had before. He stood for a moment, and this time the current gained force. The experimenter pushed his lever all the way over.

A terrible greenish-blue light suddenly illuminated the laboratory, and through the air there came sound vibrations which seemed to tear at Phillips' body. He found himself on the floor, knocked from his chair, and he writhed this way and that, speechless, suffering a torment of agony. His whole flesh seemed to tremble in unison with the waves which emanated from the machines which Lambert manipulated.

After what seemed hours to the suffering sleuth, the force diminished, and soon Phillips was able to rise. Trembling, the detective cursed and yelled for help in a high-pitched voice.

Lambert had thrown back his hood, and was rocking to and fro in agony.

"Madge, Madge," he cried, "what have I done! Come back to me, come back!"

Doherty and the others came running in at their chief's shouts. "Arrest him," ordered Phillips shakily. "I've stood enough of this nonsense."

The detectives started for Lambert. He saw them coming, and swiftly threw off the protective garments he wore.

"Stand back!" he cried, and threw the switch all the way over. The verditer green light smashed through the air, and the queer sound sensations smacked and tore them; Doherty, who had drawn a revolver when he was answering Phillips' cries, fired the gun into the air, and the report seemed to battle with the vibrating ether.

Lambert, as he threw the switch, leaped forward and landed on the metal plate under the ceiling studs, in the very center of the awful disturbance and unprotected from its force.

For a few moments, Lambert felt racking pain, as though something were tearing at his flesh, separating the very atoms. The scientist saw the wriggling figures of the sleuths, in various strange positions, but his impressions were confused. His head whirled round and round, he swayed to and fro, and, finally, he thought he fell down, or rather, that he

had melted, as a lump of sugar dissolves in water.

"He's gone—gone—"

In the heart of nothingness was Lambert, his body torn and racked in a shrieking chaos of sound and a blinding glare of iridescent light which seemed too much to bear.

His last conscious thought was a prayer, that, having failed to bring back his sweetheart, Madge Crawford, he was undergoing a step toward the same destination to which he had sent her.

John Lambert came to with a shudder. But it was not a mortal shudder. He could sense no body; had no sense of being confined by matter. He was in a strange, chilly place—a twilight region, limitless, without dimensions.

Yet he could feel something, in an impersonal way, vaguely indifferent. He had no pain now.

He was moving, somehow. He had one impelling

desire, and that was to discover Madge Crawford. Perhaps it was this thought which directed his movements.

Intent upon finding the girl, if she was indeed in this same strange world that he was, he did not notice for some time—how long, he had no way of telling—that there were other beings which tried to impede his progress. But as he grew more accustomed to the unfamiliar sensations he was undergoing, he found his path blocked again and again by queer beings.

They were living, without doubt, and had intelligence, and evinced hostility toward him. But they were shapeless, shapeless as amoebas. He heard them in a sort of soundless whisper, and could see them without the use of eyes. And he shuddered, though he could feel no body in which he might be confined. Still, when he pinched viciously with invisible fingers at the spot where his face should have been, a twinge of pain registered on the vague consciousness which appeared to be all there was to him.

He was not sure of his substance, though he could

evidently experience human sensations with his amorphous body. He did not know whether he could see; yet, he was dodging this way and that, as the beings who occupied this world tried to stop him.

They gave him the impression of gray shapes, and in coppery shadows things gleamed and closed in on him.

He seemed to hear a cry, and he knew that he was receiving a call for help from Madge Crawford. He tried to run, pushed determinedly toward the spot, impelled by his love for the girl.

Now, as he hurried, he occasionally was stopped short by collision with the formless shapes which were all about him. He was hampered by them, for they followed him, making a sound like wind heard in a dream. Whatever medium he was in was evidently thickly inhabited by the hostile beings who claimed this world as their own. Though he could not actually feel the medium, he could sense that it was heavy. He leaped and ran, fighting his way through the increasing hosts, and the roar of their voice-

impressions increased in his consciousness.

Yet there seemed to be nothing, nothing tangible save vagueness. He felt he was in a blind spot in space, a place of no dimensions, no time, where beings abhorred by nature, things which had never developed any dimensional laws, existed.

The cry for help struck him, with more force this time. Lambert, whatever form he was in, realised that he was close to the end of his journey to Madge Crawford.

He tried to speak, and had the impression that he said something reassuring. He then bumped into some vibrational being which he knew was Madge. His ears could not hear, nor could his flesh feel, but his whole form or cerebrum sensed he held the woman he loved in his arms.

And she was speaking to him, in accents of fear, begging him to save her.

"John, John, you have come at last. They have been

torturing me terribly. Save me."

"Darling Madge, I will do everything I can. Now I have found you, and we are together and will never part. Can you hear me?"

"I know what you are thinking, and what you wish to say. I can't exactly hear; it all seems vague, and impossible. Yet I can suffer. They have been hitting me with something which makes me shudder and shake—there, they are at it again."

Lambert felt the sensations, now, which the girl had made known to him. He felt crowded by gray beings, and his existence was troubled by spasms of pain-impressions. He knew Madge was crying out, too.

He could not comprehend the attacks, or guess their meaning. But the situation was unendurable.

Anger shook him, and he began to fight, furiously but vaguely. They were closely hemmed in, but when Lambert began to strike out with hands and legs, the beings gave way a little. The scientist tried to shout,

and though he could actually hear nothing, the result was gratifying. The formless creatures seemed to scatter and draw back in confusion as he yelled his defiance.

"They hate that," Madge said to him. "I have screamed myself hoarse and that is why they have not killed me—if I can be killed."

"I do not believe we can. But they can torture us," replied Lambert. "It is an everlasting half-life or quarter-life, and these creatures who call this Hell's Dimension home, have nothing but hatred for us in their consciousness."

The inhabitants of the imperfect world had closed in once again and the sharp instruments of torture they used were being thrust into the invisible bodies of the two humans. Each time, Lambert was unable to restrain his cries, for it seemed that he was being torn to pieces by vibrations.

He yelled until he could not speak above a whisper, or at least until the impressions of speech he gave forth

did not trouble the beings. The two humans, still bound to some extent by their mortal beliefs, were chivvied to and fro, and struck and bullied. The creatures seemed to delight in this sport.

The two felt they could not die; yet they could suffer terribly. Would this go on through eternity? Was there no release?

They were trying to tear Madge away from him. She was fighting them, and Lambert, in a frenzy of rage, made a determined effort to get away with the girl from their tormentors.

They retreated before his onslaughts. Drawing Madge after him, Lambert put down his head—or believed he was doing so—and ran as fast as he could at the beings.

He bumped into some invisible forms and was slowed in his rush, but he shouted and flailed about with his arms, and tried to kick. Madge helped by screaming and striking out. They made some distance in this way, or so they thought, and the horrid creatures gave

way before them.

All about them was the coppery sensation of the medium in which they moved: Lambert as he became more used to the form he was inhabiting, he began to think he could discern dreadful eyes which stared unblinkingly at the couple.

He fought on, and believed they had come to a spot where the beings did not molest them, though they still sensed the things glaring at them.

Were they on some invisible eminence, above the reach of these queer creatures?

"We might as well stop here, for if we try to go farther we may come to a worse place," said Lambert.

They rested there, in temporary peace, together at last.

"I seem to be happy now," said Madge, clinging close. "I feared I would never see you again. John dear. I ran to you when you called out that day and when I

crossed the plate, I was torn and racked and knocked down. When I next experienced sensation, it was in this terrible form. I am becoming more used to it, but I kept crying out for you: the beings, as soon as they discovered my presence, began to torment me. More and more have been collecting, and I have a sensation of seeing them as horrible, revolting beasts. Oh, John, I don't think I could have stood it much longer, if you hadn't come to me. They were driving me on, on, on, ceaselessly torturing me."

"Curse them," said Lambert. "I wish I could really get hold of some of them. Perhaps, Madge, I will be able to think of some escape for us from this Hell's Dimension."

"Yes, darling. I could not bear to think that we are eternally damned to exist among these beings, hurt by them and unable to get away. How I wish we were back in the laboratory, at the tea table. How happy we were there!"

"And we will be again, Madge." Lambert was far from feeling hopeful, but he tried to encourage the girl into

thinking they might get away.

However, he was unable to dissimulate. She felt his anguish for her safety. "But I know now that you love me. I can feel it stronger than ever before, John. It seems like a great rock to which I can always cling, your love. It projects me from the hatred that these beasts pour out against us."

Since they had no sense of time, they could not tell how long they were allowed to remain unmolested. But in each other's company they were happy, though each one was afraid for the safety of the loved one.

They spoke of the mortal life they had lived, and their love. They felt no need of food or water, but clung together in a dimensionless universe, held up by love.

The lull came to an end, at last. There was no change in the coppery vagueness about them which they sensed as the surrounding ether, but all was changeless, boundless. Lambert, close to Madge Crawford, felt that they were about to be attacked.

He had swift, temporary impressions of seeing saucerlike, unblinking eyes, and then hordes of bizarre inhabitants started to climb up to their perch.

For a short while, Lambert and Madge fought them off, thrusting at them, seeming to push them backward down the intangible slope; the cries which the dematerialized humans uttered also helped to hold the leaders of the attacking army partially in check, but the vast number of beings swept forward.

The thrusts of the torture-fields they emanated became more and more racking, as the two unfortunates shuddered in horror and pain.

The power to demonstrate loud noise was evidently impossible to the creatures, for their only sounds came to Madge Crawford and John Lambert as long-drawn out, almost unbearable squeaks, mouse-like in character. Perhaps they had never had the faculty of speech, since they did not need it to communicate with one another; perhaps they realized that the racket they could make would hurt them as much as it did their enemies.

Lambert, Madge clinging to him, was forced backward down the slope, and the beings had the advantage of height. He could not again reach the eminence, but the way behind seemed to clear quickly enough, though thrusts were made at him, innumerable times with the torture-fields.

The hordes pushed them backward, and ever back.

They were forced on for some distance. As they retreated, the way become easier, and fewer and fewer of the beings impeded the channel along which they moved, though in front of them and on all sides, above, beneath, they were pressed by the hordes.

"They are forcing us to some place they want us to go," said Lambert desperately.

"We can do nothing more," replied the girl.

Lambert felt her quiet confidence in him, and that as long as they were together, all was well.

"Maybe they can kill us, somehow," he said.

And now, Lambert felt the way was clear to the rear. There was a sudden rush of the creatures, and needlelike fields were impelled viciously into the spaces the two humans occupied.

Madge cried out in pain, and Lambert shouted. The throng drew away from them as suddenly as it had surged forward, and an instant later the pair, clinging together, felt that they were falling, falling, falling....

"Are you all right, Madge?"

"Yes, John."

But he knew she was suffering. How long they fell he did not know, but they stopped at last. No sooner had they come to rest than they were assailed with sensations of pain which made both cry out in anguish.

There, in the spot where they had been thrust by the hordes, they felt that there was some terrific vibration which racked and tore at their invisible forms continuously, sending them into spasms of sharp

misery.

They both were forced to give vent to their feelings by loud cries. But they could not command their movements any longer. When they tried to get away, their limbs moved but they felt that they remained in the same spot.

The pain shook every fraction of their souls.

"We—we are in some pit of hell, into which they have thrown us, John," gasped Madge.

He knew she was shivering with the torture of that great vibration from which there was no escape, that they were in a prison-pit of Hell's Dimension.

"I—oh—John—I'm dying!"

But he was powerless to help her. He suffered as much as she. Yet there was no weakening of his sensations; he was in as much torture as he had been at the start. He knew that they could not die and could never escape from this misery of hell.

Their cries seemed to disturb the vacuum about. Lambert, shivering and shaking with pain, was aware that great eyes, similar to those which they had thought they saw above, were now upon them. Squeaks were impressed upon him, squeaks which expressed disapprobation. There were some of the beings in the pit with them.

Madge knew they were there, too. She cried out in terror, "Will they add to our misery?"

But the creatures in the vacuum were pinned to the spots they occupied, as were Madge and Lambert. From their squeaks it was evident they suffered, too, and were fellow prisoners of the mortals.

"Probably the cries we make disturb them," said Lambert. "Vibrations to which we and they are not attuned are torture to the form we are in. Evidently the inhabitants of this hell world punish offenders by condemning them to this eternal torture."

"Why—why did they treat us so?"

"Perhaps we jarred upon them, hurt them, because we were not of their kind exactly," said Lambert.

"Perhaps it was just their natural hatred of us as strangers."

They did not grow used to the terrible eternity of torments. No, if anything, it grew worse as it went on. Still, they could visualize no end to the existence to which they were bound. Throbs of awful intensity rent them, tore them apart myriad times, yet they still felt as keenly as before and suffered just as much. There was no death for them, no release from the intangible world in which they were.

Their fellow prisoners squeaked at them, as though imploring them not to add to the agony by uttering discordant cries. But it was impossible for Madge to keep quiet, and Lambert shouted in anguish from time to time.

There seemed to be no end to it.

And yet, after what was eternity to the sufferers, Madge spoke hopefully.

"Darling John, I—I fear I am really going to die. I am growing weaker. I can feel the pain very little now. It is all vague, and is getting less real to me. Good-by, sweetheart, I love you, and I always will—"

Lambert uttered a strangled cry, "No, no. Don't leave me, Madge."

He clung to her, yet she was becoming extremely intangible to him. She was melting away from his embrace, and Lambert felt that he, too, was weaker, even less real than he had been. He hoped that if it was the end, they would go together.

Desperately, he tried to hold her with him, but he had little ability to do so. The torture was still racking his consciousness, but was becoming more dreamlike.

There was a terrific snap, suddenly, and Lambert lost all consciousness....

"Water, water!"

Lambert, opening his eyes, felt his body writhing

about, and experienced pain that was—mortal. A bluish-green light dazzled his pupils and made him blink.

Something cut into his flesh, and Lambert rolled about, trying to escape. He bumped into something, something soft; he clung to this form, and knew that he was holding on to a human being. Then the light died out, and in its stead was the yellow, normal glow of the electric lights. Weak, famished, almost dead of thirst, Lambert looked about him at the familiar sights of his laboratory. He was lying on the floor, close by the metal plate, and at his side, unconscious but still alive to judge by her rising and falling breast, was Madge Crawford.

Someone bent over him, and pressed a glass of water against his lips. He drank, watching while a mortal whom Lambert at last realized was Detective Phillips bathed Madge Crawford's temples with water from a pitcher and forced a little between her pale, drawn lips.

Lambert tried to rise, but he was weak, and required

assistance. He was dazed, still, and they sat him down in a chair and allowed him to come to.

He shuddered from time to time, for he still thought he could feel the torture which he had been undergoing. But he was worried about Madge, and watched anxiously as Phillips, assisted by another man, worked over the girl.

At last, Madge stirred and moaned faintly. They lifted her to a bench, where they gently restored her to full consciousness.

When she could sit up, she at once cried out for Lambert.

The scientist had recovered enough to rise to his feet and stagger toward her. "Here I am, darling," he said.

"John—we're alive—we're back in the laboratory!"

"Ah, Lambert. Glad to see you." A heavy voice spoke, and Lambert for the first time noticed the black-clad figure which stood to one side, near the switchboard,

hidden by a large piece of apparatus.

"Dr. Morgan!" cried Lambert.

Althaus Morgan, the renowned physicist, came forward calmly, with outstretched hand. "So, you realized your great ambition, eh?" he said curiously. "But where would you be if I had not been able to bring you back?"

"In Hell—or Hell's Dimension, anyway," said Lambert.

He went to Madge, took her in his arms. "Darling, we are safe. Morgan has managed to re-materialize us. We will never again be cast into the void in this way. I shall destroy the apparatus and my notes."

Doherty, who had been out of the room on some errand, came into the laboratory. He shouted when he saw Lambert standing before him.

"So you got him," he cried. "Where was he hidin'?"

His eyes fell upon Madge Crawford, then, and he

exclaimed in satisfaction. "You found her, eh?"

"No," said Phillips. "They came back. They suddenly appeared out of nothing, Doherty."

"Don't kid me," growled Doherty. "They were hidin' in a closet somewhere. Maybe they can fool you guys, but not me."

Lambert spoke to Phillips. "I'm starving to death and I think Miss Crawford must be, too. Will you tell Felix to bring us some food, plenty of it?"

One of the sleuths went to the kitchen to give the order. Lambert turned to Morgan.

"How did you manage to bring us back?" he asked.

Morgan shrugged. "It was all guess work at the last. I at first could check the apparatus by your notes, and this took some time. You know you have written me in detail about what you were working on, so when I was summoned by Detective Phillips, who said you had mentioned my name to him as the only one who could

help, I could make a good conjecture as to what had occurred. I heard the stories of all concerned, and realized that you must have dematerialized Miss Crawford by mistake, and then, unable to bring her back, had followed her yourself.

"I put on your insulation outfit, and went to work. I have not left here for a moment, but have snatched an hour or two of sleep from time to time. Detective Phillips has been very good and helpful.

"Finally, I had everything in shape, but I reversed the apparatus in vital spots, and tried each combination until suddenly, a few minutes ago, you were re-materialized. It was a desperate chance, but I was forced to take it in an endeavor to save you."

Lambert held out his hand to his friend. "I can never thank you enough," he said gratefully. "You saved us from a horrible fate. But you speak as though we had been gone a long while. Was it many hours?"

"Hours?" repeated Morgan, his lips parting under his black beard. "Man, it was eight days! You have been

gone since a week ago last night!"

Lambert turned to Phillips. "I must ask you not to release this story to the newspapers," he begged.

Phillips smiled and turned up his hands in a gesture of frank wonder. "Professor Lambert," he said, "I can't believe what I have seen myself. If I told such a yarn to the reporters, they'd never forget it. They'd kid me out of the department."

"Aw, they were hidin' in a closet," growled Doherty. "Come on, we've wasted too much time on this job already. Just a couple of nuts, says I."

The sleuths, after Phillips had shaken hands with Lambert, left the laboratory. Morgan, a large man of middle age, joined them in a meal which Felix served to the three on a folding table brought in for the purpose. Felix was terribly glad to see Madge and Lambert again, and manifested his joy by many bobs and leaps as he waited upon them. A grin spread across his face from ear to ear.

Morgan asked innumerable questions. They described as best they could what they could recall of the strange dominion in which they had been, and the physicist listened intently.

"It is some Hell's Dimension, as you call it," he said at last.

"Where it is, or exactly what, I cannot say," said Lambert. "I surely have no desire to return to that world of hate."

Madge, happy now, smiled at him and he leaned over and kissed her tenderly.

"We have come from Hell, together," said Lambert, "and now we are in Heaven!"

80 The World Behind the Moon by Paul Ernst

Two intrepid Earth-men fight it out with the horrific monsters of Zeud's frightful jungles.

Aproximate word count: 6,900

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

Like pitiless jaws, a distant crater opened for their ship. Helplessly, they hurtled toward it: helplessly, because they were still in the nothingness of space, with no atmospheric resistance on which their rudders, or stern or bow tubes, could get a purchase to steer them.

Professor Dorn Wichter waited anxiously for the slight vibration that should announce that the projectile-shaped shell had entered the new planet's atmosphere.

"Have we struck it yet?" asked Joyce, a tall blond young man with the shoulders of an athlete and the broad brow and square chin of one who combines dreams with action. He made his way painfully toward Wichter. It was the first time he had attempted to move since the shell had passed the neutral point—that belt midway between the moon and the world behind it, where the pull of gravity of each satellite was neutralized by the other. They, and all the loose objects in the shell, had floated uncomfortably about the middle of the chamber for half an hour or so, gradually settling down again; until now it was possible, with care, to walk.

"Have we struck it?" he repeated, leaning over the professor's shoulder and staring at the resistance gauge.

"No." Absently Wichter took off his spectacles and polished them. "There's not a trace of resistance yet."

They gazed out the bow window toward the vast disc, like a serrated, pock-marked plate of blue ice, that was the planet Zeud—discovered and named by them.

The same thought was in the mind of each. Suppose there were no atmosphere surrounding Zeud to cushion their descent into the hundred-mile crater that yawned to receive them?

"Well," said Joyce after a time, "we're taking no more of a chance here than we did when we pointed our nose toward the moon. We were almost sure that was no atmosphere there—which meant we'd nose dive into the rocks at five thousand miles an hour. On Zeud there might be anything." His eyes shone. "How wonderful that there should be such a planet, unsuspected during all the centuries men have been studying the heavens!"

Wichter nodded agreement. It was indeed wonderful. But what was more wonderful was its present discovery: for that would never have transpired had not he and Joyce succeeded in their attempt to fly to the moon. From there, after following the sun in its slow journey around to the lost side of the lunar globe—that face which the earth has never yet observed—they had seen shining in the near distance the great ball which they had christened Zeud.

Astronomical calculations had soon described the mysterious hidden satellite. It was almost a twin to the moon; a very little smaller, and less than eighty thousand miles away. Its rotation was nearly similar, which made its days not quite sixteen of our earthly days. It was of approximately the weight, per cubic mile, of Earth. And there it whirled, directly in a line with the earth and the moon, moving as the moon moved so that it was ever out of sight beyond it, as a dime would be out of sight if placed in a direct line behind a penny.

Zeud, the new satellite, the world beyond the moon! In their excitement at its discovery, Joyce and Wichter had left the moon—which they had found to be as dead and cold as it had been surmised to be—and returned summarily to Earth. They had replenished their supplies and their oxygen tanks, and had come back—to circle around the moon and point the sharp prow of the shell toward Zeud. The gift of the moon to Earth was a dubious one; but the gift of a possibly living planet-colony to mankind might be the solution of the overcrowded conditions of the terrestrial

sphere!

"Speed, three thousand miles an hour," computed Wichter. "Distance to Zeud, nine hundred and eighty miles. If we don't strike a few atoms of hydrogen or something soon we're going to drill this nearest crater a little deeper!"

Joyce nodded grimly. At two thousand miles from Earth there had still been enough hydrogen traces in the ether to give purchase to the explosions of their water-motor. At six hundred miles from the moon they had run into a sparse gaseous belt that had enabled them to change direction and slow their speed. They had hoped to find hydrogen at a thousand or twelve hundred miles from Zeud.

"Eight hundred and thirty miles," commented Wichter, his slender, bent body tensed. "Eight hundred miles—ah!"

A thrumming sound came to their ears as the shell quivered, imperceptibly almost, but unmistakably, at the touch of some faint resistance outside in space.

"We've struck it, Joyce. And it's much denser than the moon's, even as we'd hoped. There'll be life on Zeud, my boy, unless I'm vastly mistaken. You'd better look to the motor now."

Joyce went to the water-motor. This was a curious, but extremely simple affair. There was a glass box, ribbed with polished steel, about the size and shape of a cigar box, which was full of water. Leading away from this, to the bow and stern of the shell, were two small pipes. The pipes were greatly thickened for a period of three feet or so, directly under the little tank, and were braced by bed-plates so heavy as to look all out of proportion. Around the thickened parts of the pipes were coils of heavy, insulated copper wire. There were no valves nor cylinders, no revolving parts: that was all there was to the "motor."

Joyce didn't yet understand the device. The water dripped from the tank, drop by drop, to be abruptly disintegrated, made into an explosive, by being subjected to a powerful magnetic field induced in the coils by a generator in the bow of the shell. As each drop of water passed into the pipes, and was

instantaneously broken up, there was a violent but controlled explosion—and the shell was kicked another hundred miles ahead on its journey. That was all Joyce knew about it.

He threw the bow switch. There was a soft shock as the motor exhausted through the forward tube, slowing their speed.

"Turn on the outside generator propellers," ordered Wichter. "I think our batteries are getting low."

Joyce slipped the tiny, slim-bladed propellers into gear. They began to turn, slowly at first in the almost non-existent atmosphere.

"Four hundred miles," announced Wichter. "How's the temperature?"

Joyce stepped to the thermometer that registered the heat of the outer wall. "Nine hundred degrees," he said.

"Cut down to a thousand miles an hour," commanded

Wichter. "Five hundred as soon as the motor will catch that much. I'll keep our course straight toward this crater. It's in wells like that, that we'll find livable air—if we're right in believing there is such a thing on Zeud."

Joyce glanced at the thermometer. It still registered hundreds of degrees, though their speed had been materially reduced.

"I guess there's livable air, all right," he said. "It's pretty thick outside already."

The professor smiled. "Another theory vindicated. I was sure that Zeud, swinging on the outside of the Earth-moon-Zeud chain and hence traveling at a faster rate, would pick up most of the moon's atmosphere over a period of millions of years. Also it must have been shielded by the moon, to some extent, against the constant small atmospheric leakage most celestial globes are subject to. Just the same, when we land, we'll test conditions with a rat or two."

At a signal from him, Joyce checked their speed to

four hundred miles an hour, then to two hundred, and then, as they descended below the highest rim of the circular cliffs of the crater, almost to a full stop. They floated toward the surface of Zeud, watching with breathless interest the panorama that unfolded beneath them.

They were nosing toward a spot that was being favored with the Zeudian sunrise. Sharp and clear the light rays slanted down, illuminating about half the crater's floor and leaving the cliff protected half in dim shadow.

The illuminated part of the giant pit was as bizarre as the landscape of a nightmare. There were purplish trees, immense beyond belief. There were broad, smooth pools of inky black fluid that was oily and troubled in spots as though disturbed by some moving things under the surface. There were bare, rocky patches where the stones, the long drippings of ancient lava flow, were spread like bleaching gray skeletons of monsters. And over all, rising from pools and bare ground and jungle alike, was a thin, miasmic mist.

Sustained by the slow, steady exhaust of the motor, rising a little with each partly muffled explosion and sinking a little further in each interval, they settled toward a bare, lava strewn spot that appealed to Wichter as being a good landing place. With a last hiss, and a grinding jar, they grounded. Joyce opened the switch to cut off the generator.

"Now let's see what the air's like," said Wichter, lifting down a small cage in which was penned an active rat.

He opened a double panel in the shell's hull, and freed the little animal. In an agony of suspense they watched it as it leaped onto the bare lava and halted a moment....

"Seems to like it," said Joyce, drawing a great breath.

The rat, as though intoxicated by its sudden freedom, raced away out of sight, covering eight or ten feet at a bound, its legs scurrying ludicrously in empty air during its short flights.

"That means that we can dispense with oxygen

helmets—and that we'd better take our guns," said Wichter, his voice tense, his eyes snapping behind his glasses.

He stepped to the gun rack. In this were half a dozen air-guns. Long and of very small bore, they discharged a tiny steel shell in which was a liquid of his invention that, about a second after the heat of its forced passage through the rifle barrel, expanded instantly in gaseous form to millions of times its liquid bulk. It was the most powerful explosive yet found, but one that was beautifully safe to carry inasmuch as it could be exploded only by heat.

"Are we ready?" he said, handing a gun to Joyce.
"Then—let's go!"

But for a breath or two they hesitated before opening the heavy double door in the side of the hull, savoring to the full the immensity of the moment.

The rapture of the explorer who is the first to set foot on a vast new continent was theirs, magnified a hundredfold. For they were the first to set foot on a

vast new planet! An entire new world, containing heaven alone knew what forms of life, what monstrous or infinitesimal creatures, lay before them. Even the profound awe they had experienced when landing on the moon was dwarfed by the solemnity of this occasion; just as it is less soul stirring to discover an arctic continent which is perpetually cased in barren ice, than to discover a continent which is warmly fruitful and, probably, teeming with life.

Still wordless, too stirred to speak, they opened the vault-like door and stepped out—into a humid heat which was like that of their own tropical regions, but not so unendurable.

In their short stay on the moon, during which they had taken several walks in their insulated suits, they had become somewhat accustomed to the decreased weight of their bodies due to the lesser gravity, so that here, where their weight was even less, they did not make any blunders of stepping twenty feet instead of a yard.

Walking warily, glancing alertly in all directions to

guard against any strange animals that might rush out to destroy them, they moved toward the nearest stretch of jungle.

The first thing that arrested their attention was the size of the trees they were approaching. They had got some idea of their hugeness from the shell, but viewed from ground level they loomed even larger. Eight hundred, a thousand feet they reared their mighty tops, with trunks hundreds of feet in circumference; living pyramids whose bases wove together to make an impenetrable ceiling over the jungle floor. The leaves were thick and bloated like cactus growths, and their color was a pronounced lavender.

"We must take back several of those leaves," said Wichter, his scientific soul filled with cold excitement.

"I wish we could take back some of this air, too." Joyce filled his lungs to capacity. "Isn't it great? Like wine! It almost counteracts the effects of the heat."

"There's more oxygen in it than in our own," surmised

Wichter. "My God! What's that!"

They halted for an instant. From the depths of the lavender jungle had come an ear shattering, screaming hiss, as though some monstrous serpent were in its death agony.

They waited to hear if the noise would be repeated. It wasn't. Dubiously they started on again.

"We'd better not go in there too far," said Joyce. "If we didn't come out again it would cost Earth a new planet. No one else knows the secret of your water-motor."

"Oh, nothing living can stand against these guns of ours," replied Wichter confidently. "And that noise might not have been caused by anything living. It might have been steam escaping from some volcanic crevice."

They started cautiously down a well defined, hard packed trail through thorny lavender underbrush. As they went, Joyce blazed marks on various tree trunks

marking the direction back to the shell. The tough fibres exuded a bluish liquid from the cuts that bubbled slowly like blood.

To the right and left of them were cup-shaped bushes that looked like traps; and that their looks were not deceiving was proved by a muffled, bleating cry that rose from the compressed leaves of one of them they passed. Sluggish, blind crawling things like three-foot slugs flowed across their path and among the tree trunks, leaving viscous trails of slime behind them. And there were larger things....

"Careful," said Wichter suddenly, coming to a halt and peering into the gloom at their right.

"What did you see?" whispered Joyce.

Wichter shook his head. The gigantic, two-legged, purplish figure he had dimly made out in the steamy dark, had moved away. "I don't know. It looked a little like a giant ape."

They halted and took stock of their situation,

mechanically wiping perspiration from their streaming faces, and pondering as to whether or not they should turn back. Joyce, who was far from being a coward, thought they should.

"In this undergrowth," he pointed out, "we might be rushed before we could even fire our guns. And we're nearly a mile from the shell."

But Wichter was like an eager child.

"We'll press on just a little," he urged. "To that clear spot in front of us." He pointed along the trail to where sunlight was blazing down through an opening in the trees. "As soon as we see what's there, we'll go back."

With a shrug, Joyce followed the eager little man down the weird trail under the lavender trees. In a few moments they had reached the clearing which was Wichter's goal. They halted on its edge, gazing at it with awe and repulsion.

It was a circular quagmire of festering black mud

about a hundred yards across. Near at hand they could see the mud heaving, very slowly, as though abysmal forms of life were tunneling along just under the surface. They glanced toward the center of the bog, which was occupied by one of the smooth black pools, and cried aloud at what they saw.

At the brink of the pool was lying a gigantic creature like a great, thick snake—a snake with a lizard's head, and a series of many-jointed, scaled legs running down its powerful length. Its mouth was gaping open to reveal hundreds of needle-sharp, backward pointing teeth. Its legs and thick, stubbed tail were threshing feebly in the mud as though it were in distress; and its eyes, so small as to be invisible in its repulsive head, were glazed and dull.

"Was that what we heard back a ways?" wondered Joyce.

"Probably," said Wichter. His eyes shone as he gazed at the nightmare shape. Impulsively he took a step toward the stirring mud.

"Don't be entirely insane," snapped Joyce, catching his arm.

"I must see it closer," said Wichter, tugging to be free.

"Then we'll climb a tree and look down on it. We'll probably be safer up off the ground anyway."

They ascended the nearest jungle giant—whose rubbery bark was so ringed and scored as to be as easy to climb as a staircase—to the first great bough, about fifty feet from the ground, and edged out till they hung over the rim of the quagmire. From there, with the aid of their binoculars, they expected to see the dying monster in every detail. But when they looked toward the pool it was not in sight!

"Were we seeing things?" exclaimed Wichter, rubbing his glasses. "I'd have sworn it was lying there!"

"It was," said Joyce grimly. "Look at the pool. That'll tell you where it went."

The black, secretive surface was bubbling and waving

as though, down in its depths, a terrific fight were taking place.

"Something came up and dragged our ten-legged lizard down to its den. Then that something's brothers got onto the fact that a feast was being held, and rushed in. That pool would be no place for a before-breakfast dip!"

Wichter started to say something in reply, then gazed, hypnotized, at the opposite wall of the jungle.

From the dense screen of lavender foliage stretched a glistening, scale-armored neck, as thick as a man's body at its thinnest point, which was just behind a tremendous-jawed crocodilian head. It tapered back for a distance of at least thirty feet, to merge into a body as big as that of a terrestrial whale, that was supported by four squat, ponderous legs.

Moving with surprising rapidity, the enormous thing slid into the mud and began ploughing a way, belly deep, toward the pool. Shapeless, slow-writhing forms were cast up in its wake, to quiver for a moment in

the sunlight and then melt below the mud again.

One of the bloated, formless mud-crawlers was snapped up in the huge jaws with an abrupt plunge of the long neck, and the monster began to feed, hog-like, slobbering over the loathsome carcass.

Wichter shook his head, half in fanatical eagerness, half in despair. "I'd like to stay and see more," he said with a sigh, "but if that's the kind of creatures we're apt to encounter in the Zeudian jungle, we'd better be going at once—"

"Sh-h!" snapped Joyce. Then, in a barely audible whisper: "I think the thing heard your voice!"

The monster had abruptly ceased its feeding. Its head, thrust high in the air, was waving inquisitively from side to side. Suddenly it expelled the air from its vast lungs in a roaring cough—and started directly for their tree.

"Shoot!" cried Wichter, raising his gun.

Moving with the speed of an express train, the monster had almost got to their overhanging branch before they could pull the triggers. Both shells imbedded themselves in the enormous chest, just as the long neck reached up for them. And at once things began to happen with cataclysmic rapidity.

Almost with their impact the shells exploded. The monster stopped, with a great hole torn in its body. Then, dying on its feet, it thrust its great head up and its huge jaws crunched over the branch to which its two puny destroyers were clinging.

With all its dozens of tons of weight, it jerked in a gargantuan death agony. The tree, enormous as it was, shook with it, and the branch itself was tossed as though in a hurricane.

There was a splintering sound. Wichter and Joyce dropped their guns to cling more tightly to the bole of the drooping branch that was their only security. The guns glanced off the mountainous body—and, with a last convulsion of the mighty legs, were swept underneath!

The monster was still at last, its insensate jaws yet gripping the bough. The two men looked at each other in speechless consternation. The shell a mile off through the dreadful jungle.... Themselves, helpless without their guns....

"Well," said Joyce at last. "I guess we'd better be on our way. Waiting here, thinking it over, won't help any. Lucky there's no night, for a couple of weeks at least, to come stealing down on us."

He started down the great trunk, with Wichter following close behind. Walking as rapidly as they could, they hurried back along the tunneled trail toward their shell.

They hadn't covered a hundred yards when they heard a mighty crashing of underbrush behind them. Glancing back, they saw tooth-studded jaws gaping cavernously at the end of a thirty-foot neck—little, dead-looking eyes glaring at them—a hundred-foot body smashing its way over the trap-bushes and through tangles of vines and down-drooping branches.

"The mate to the thing we killed back there!" Joyce panted. "Run, for God's sake!"

Wichter needed no urging. He hadn't an ounce of fear in his spare, small body. But he had an overwhelming desire to get back to Earth and deliver his message. He was trembling as he raced after Joyce, thirty feet to a bound, ducking his head to avoid hitting the thick lavender foliage that roofed the trail.

"One of us must get through!" he panted over and over. "One of us must make it!"

It was speedily apparent that they could never outrun their pursuer. The reaching jaws were only a few yards behind them now.

"You go," called Joyce, sobbing for breath. He slowed his pace deliberately.

"No—you—" Wichter slowed too. In a frenzy, Joyce shoved him along the trail.

"I tell you—"

He got no further. In front of them, where there had appeared to be solid ground, they suddenly saw a yawning pit. Desperately, they tried to veer aside, but they were too close. Their last long birdlike leap carried them over the edge. They fell, far down, into a deep chasm, splashing into a shallow pool of water.



A few clods of earth cascaded after them as the monster above dug its great splay feet into the

ground and checked its rush in time to keep from falling after them. Then the top of the pit slowly darkened as a covering of some sort slid across it. They were in a prison as profoundly quiet and utterly black as a tomb.

"Dorn," shouted Joyce. "Are you all right?"

"Yes," came a voice in the near darkness. "And you?"

"I'm still in one piece as far as I can feel." There was a splashing noise. He waded toward it and in a moment his outstretched hand touched the professor's shoulder.

"This is a fine mess," he observed shakily. "We got away from those tooth-lined jaws, all right, but I'm wondering if we're much better off than we would have been if we hadn't escaped."

"I'm wondering the same thing." Wichter's voice was strained. "Did you see the way the top of the pit closed above us? That means we're in a trap. And a most ingenious trap it is, too! The roof of it is

camouflaged until it looks exactly like the rest of the trail floor. The water in here is just shallow enough to let large animals break their necks when they fall in and just deep enough to preserve small animals—like ourselves—alive. We're in the hands of some sort of reasoning, intelligent beings, Joyce!"

"In that case," said Joyce with a shudder, "we'd better do our best to get out of here!"

But this was found to be impossible. They couldn't climb up out of the pit, and nowhere could they feel any openings in the walls. Only smooth, impenetrable stone met their questing fingers.

"It looks as though we're in to stay," said Joyce finally. "At least until our Zeudian hosts, whatever kind of creatures they may be, come and take us out. What'll we do then? Sail in and die fighting? Or go peaceably along with them—assuming we aren't killed at once—on the chance that we can make a break later?"

"I'd advise the latter," answered Wichter. "There is a small animal on our own planet whose example might

be a good one for us to follow. That's the 'possum." He stopped abruptly, and gripped Joyce's arm.

From the opposite side of the pit came a grating sound. A crack of greenish light appeared, low down near the water. This widened jerkily as though a door were being hoisted by some sort of pulley arrangement. The walls of the pit began to glow faintly with reflected light.

"Down," breathed Wichter.

Noiselessly they let themselves sink into the water until they were floating, eyes closed and motionless, on the surface. Playing dead to the best of their ability, they waited for what might happen next.

They heard a splashing near the open rock door. The splashing neared them, and high-pitched hissing syllables came to their ears—variegated sounds that resembled excited conversation in some unknown language.

Joyce felt himself touched by something, and it was all

he could do to keep from shouting aloud and springing to his feet at the contact.

He'd had no idea, of course, what might be the nature of their captors, but he had imagined them as man-like, to some extent at least. And the touch of his hand, or flipper, or whatever it was, indicated that they were not!

They were cold-blooded, reptilian things, for the flesh that had touched him was cold; as clammy and repulsive as the belly of a dead fish. So repulsive was that flesh that, when he presently felt himself lifted high up and roughly carried, he shuddered in spite of himself at the contact.

Instantly the thing that bore him stopped. Joyce held his breath. He felt an excruciating, stabbing pain in his arm, after which the journey through the water was resumed. Stubbornly he kept up his pretence of lifelessness.

The splashing ceased, and he heard flat wet feet slapping along on dry rock, indicating that they had

emerged from the pit. Then he sank into real unconsciousness.

The next thing he knew was that he was lying on smooth, bare rock in a perfect bedlam of noises. Howls and grunts, snuffling coughs and snarls beat at his ear-drums. It was as though he had fallen into a vast cage in which were hundreds of savage, excited animals—animals, however, that in spite of their excitement and ferocity were surprisingly motionless, for he heard no scraping of claws, or padding of feet.

Cautiously he opened his eyes....

He was in a large cave, the walls of which were glowing with greenish, phosphorescent light. Strewn about the floor were seemingly dead carcasses of animals. And what carcasses there were! Blubber-coated things that looked like giant tadpoles, gazelle-like creatures with a single, long slim horn growing from delicate small skulls, four-legged beasts and six-legged ones, animals with furry hides and crawlers with scaled coverings—several hundred assorted specimens of the smaller life of Zeud lay stretched out

in seeming lifelessness.

But they were not dead, these bizarre beasts of another world. They lived, and were animated with the frenzied fear of trapped things. Joyce could see the tortured heaving of their furred and scaled sides as they panted with terror. And from their throats issued the outlandish noises he had heard. They were alive enough—only they seemed unable to move!

There was nothing in his range of vision that might conceivably be the beings that had captured them, so Joyce started to lift his head and look around at the rest of the cavern. He found that he could not move. He tried again, and his body was as unresponsive as a log. In fact, he couldn't feel his body at all! In growing terror, he concentrated all his will on moving his arm. It was as limp as a rag.

He relaxed, momentarily in the grip of stark, blind panic. He was as helpless as the howling things around him! He was numbed, completely paralyzed into immobility!

The professor's voice—a weak, uncertain voice—sounded from behind him. "Joyce! Joyce!"

He found that he could talk, that the paralysis that gripped the rest of his muscles had not extended to the vocal cords. "Dorn! Thank God you're alive! I couldn't see you, and I thought—"

"I'm alive, but that's about all," said Wichter. "I—I can't move."

"Neither can I. We've been drugged in some manner—just as all the other animals in here have been drugged. I must have got my dose in the pit. I was cut, or stabbed, in the arm."

Joyce stopped talking as he suddenly heard steps, like human footsteps yet weirdly different—flap-flapping sounds as though awkward flippers were slapping along the rock floor toward them. The steps stopped within a few feet of them; then, after what seemed hours, they sounded again, this time in front of him.

He opened his eyes, cautiously, barely moving his

eyelids, and saw at last, in every hideous detail, one of the super-beasts that had captured Wichter and himself.

It was a horrible cartoon of a man, the thing that stood there in the greenish glow of the cave. Nine or ten feet high, it loomed; hairless, with a faintly iridescent, purplish hide. A thick, cylindrical trunk sloped into a neck only a little smaller than the body itself. Set on this was a bony, ugly head that was split clear across by lipless jaws. There was no nose, only slanted holes like the nostrils of an animal; and over these were set pale, expressionless, pupil-less eyes. The arms were short and thick and ended in bifurcated lumps of flesh like swollen hands encased in old-fashioned mittens. The legs were also grotesquely short, and the feet mere shapeless flaps.

It was standing near one of the smaller animals, apparently regarding it closely. Observing it himself, Joyce saw that it was moving a little. As though coming out of a coma, it was raising its bizarre head and trying to get on its feet.

Leisurely the two-legged monster bent over it. Two long fangs gleamed in the lipless mouth. These were buried in the neck of the reviving beast—and instantly it sank back into immobility.

Having reduced it to helplessness—the monster ate it! The lipless jaws gaped widely. The shapeless hands forced in the head of the animal. The throat muscles expanded hugely: and in less than a minute it had swallowed its living prey as a boa-constrictor swallows a monkey.

Joyce closed his eyes, feeling weak and nauseated. He didn't open them again till long after he had heard the last of the awkward, flapping footsteps.

"Could you see it?" asked Wichter, who was lying so closely behind him that he couldn't observe the monstrous Zeudian. "What did it do? What was it like?"

Joyce told him of the way the creature had fed. "We are evidently in their provision room," he concluded. "They keep some of their food alive, it seems.... Well,

it's a quick death."

"Tell me more about the way the other animal moved, just before it was eaten."

"There isn't much to tell," said Joyce wearily. "It didn't move long after those fangs were sunk into it."

"But don't you see!" There was sudden hope in Wichter's voice. "That means that the effect of the poison, which is apparently injected by those fangs, wears off after a time. And in that case—"

"In that case," Joyce interjected, "we'd have only an unknown army of ten-foot Zeudians, the problem of finding a way to the surface of the ground again, and the lack of any kind of weapons, to keep us from escaping!"

"We're not quite weaponless, though," the professor whispered back. "Over in a corner there's a pile of the long, slender horns that sprout from the heads of some of these creatures. Evidently the Zeudians cut them out, or break them off before eating that

particular type of animal. They'd be as good as lances, if we could get hold of them."

Joyce said nothing, but hope began to beat in his own breast. He had noticed a significant happening during the age-long hours in the commissary cave. Most of the Zeudians had entered from the direction of the pit. But one had come in through an opening in the opposite side. And this one had blinked pale eyes as though dazzled from bright sunlight—and was bearing some large, woody looking tubers that seemed to have been freshly uprooted! There was a good chance, thought Joyce, that that opening led to a tunnel up to the world above!

He drew a deep breath—and felt a dim pain in his back, caused by the cramping position in which he had lain for so long.

He could have shouted aloud with the thrill of that discovery. This was the first time he had felt his body at all! Did it mean that the effect of the poison was wearing off—that it wasn't as lastingly paralyzing to his earthly nerve centers as to those of Zeudian

creatures around them? He flexed the muscles of his leg. The leg moved a fraction of an inch.

"Dorn!" he called softly, "I can move a little! Can you?"

"Yes," Wichter answered, "I've been able to wriggle my fingers for several minutes. I think I could walk in an hour or two."

"Then pray for that hour or two. It might mean our escape!" Joyce told him of the seldom used entrance that he thought led to the open air. "I'm sure it goes to the surface, Dorn. Those woody looking tubers had been freshly picked."

Three of the two-legged monsters came in just then. They relapsed into lifeless silence. There was a horrible moment as the three paused over them longer than any of the others had. Was it obvious that the effects of the numbing poison was wearing off? Would they be bitten again—or eaten?

The Zeudians finally moved on, hissing and clicking to

each other. Eventually the cold-blooded things fed, and dragged lethargically out of the cave in the direction of the pit.

With every passing minute Joyce could feel life pouring back into his numbed body. His cramped muscles were in agony now—a pain that gave him fierce pleasure. At last, risking observation, he lifted his head and then struggled to a sitting position and looked around.

No Zeudian was in sight. Evidently they were too sure of their poison glands to post a guard over them. He listened intently, and could hear no dragging footsteps. He turned to Wichter, who had followed his example and was sitting up, feebly rubbing his body to restore circulation.

"Now's our chance," he whispered. "Stand up and walk a little to steady your legs, while I go over and get us a couple of those sharp horns. Then we'll see where that entrance of mine goes!"

He walked to the pile of bones and horns in the

corner and selected two of the longest and slimmest of the ivory-like things. Just as he had rejoined Wichter he heard the sound with which he was now so grimly familiar—flapping, awkward footsteps. Wildly he signaled the professor. They dropped in their tracks, just as the approaching monster stumped into the cave.

For an instant he dared hope that their movement had gone unobserved, but his hope was rudely shattered. He heard a sharp hiss: heard the Zeudian flap toward them at double-quick time. Abandoning all pretense, he sprang to his feet just as the thing reached him, its fangs gleaming wickedly in the greenish light.

He leaped to the side, going twenty feet or more with the press of his Earth muscles against the reduced gravity. The creature rushed on toward the professor. That game little man crouched and awaited its onslaught. But Joyce had sprung back again before the two could clash.

He raised the long horn and plunged it into the smooth, purplish back. Again and again he drove it

home, as the monster writhed under him. It had enormous vitality. Gashed and dripping, it yet struggled on, attempting to encircle Joyce with its stubby arms. Once it succeeded, and he felt his ribs crack as it contracted its powerful body. But a final stroke finished the savage fight. He got up and, with an incoherent cry to Wichter, raced toward the opening on which they pinned their hopes of reaching the upper air.

Hissing cries and the thudding of many feet came to them just as they reached the arched mouth of the passage. But the cries, and the constant pandemonium of the paralysed animals died behind them as they bounded along the tunnel.

They emerged at last into the sunlight they had never expected to see again, beside one of the great lavender trees. They paused an instant to try to get their bearings.

"This way," panted Joyce as he saw, on a hard-packed path ahead of them, one of the trail-marks he had blazed.

Down the trail they raced, toward their space shell. Fortunately they met none of the tremendous animals that infested the jungles; and their journey to the clearing in which the shell was lying was accomplished without accident.

"We're safe now," gasped Wichter, as they came in sight of the bare lava patch. "We can outrun them five feet to their one!"

They burst into the clearing—and halted abruptly. Surrounding the shell, stumping curiously about it and touching it with their shapeless hands, were dozens of the Zeudians.

"My God!" groaned Joyce. "There must be at least a hundred of them! We're lost for certain now!"

They stared with hopeless longing at the vehicle that, if only they could reach it, could carry them back to Earth. Then they turned to each other and clasped hands, without a word. The same thought was in the mind of each—to rush at the swarming monsters and fight till they were killed. There was absolutely no

chance of winning through to the shell, but it was infinitely better to die fighting than be swallowed alive.

So engrossed were the Zeudians by the strange thing that had fallen into their province, that Joyce and Wichter got within a hundred feet of them before they turned their pale eyes in their direction. Then, baring their fangs, they streamed toward the Earth men, just as the pursuing Zeudians entered the clearing from the jungle trail.

The two prepared to die as effectively as possible. Each grasped his lace-like horn tightly. The professor mechanically adjusted his glasses more firmly on his nose....

With his move, the narrowing circle of Zeudians halted. A violent clamor broke out among them. They glared at the two, but made no further step toward them.

"What in the world—" began Wichter bewilderedly.

"Your glasses!" Joyce shouted, gripping his shoulder. "When you moved them, they all stopped! They must be afraid of them, somehow. Take them clear off and see what happens."

Wichter removed his spectacles, and swung them in his hand, peering near-sightedly at the crowding Zeudians.

Their reaction to his simple move was remarkable! Hisses of consternation came from their lipless mouths. They faced each other uneasily, waving their stubby arms and covering their own eyes as though suddenly afraid they would lose them.

Taking advantage of their indecision, Joyce and Wichter walked boldly toward them. They moved aside, forming a reluctant lane. Some of the Zeudians in the rear shoved to close in on them, but the ones in front held them back. It wasn't until the two were nearly through that the lane began to straggle into a threatening circle around them again. The Zeudians were evidently becoming reassured by the fact that Wichter continued to see all right in spite of the little

strange creature's alarming act of removing his eyes.

"Do it again," breathed Joyce, perspiration beading his forehead as the giants moved closed, their fangs tentatively bared for the numbing poison stroke.

Wichter popped his glasses on, then jerked them off with a cry, as though he were suffering intensely. Once more the Zeudians faltered and drew back, feeling at their own eyes.

"Run!" cried Joyce. And they raced for the haven of the shell.

The Zeudians swarmed after them, snarling and hissing. Barely ahead of the nearest, Joyce and Wichter dove into the open panel. They slammed it closed just as a powerful, stubby arm reached after them. There was a screaming hiss, and a cold, cartilagenous lump of flesh dropped to the floor of the shell—half the monster's hand, sheared off between the sharp edge of the door and the metal hull.

Joyce threw in the generator switch. With a soft roar

the water-motor exploded into action, sending the shell far into the sky.

"When we return," said Joyce, adding a final thousand miles an hour to their speed before they should fly free of the atmosphere of Zeud, "I think we'd better come at the head of an army, equipped with air-guns and explosive bombs."

"And with glasses," added the professor, taking off his spectacles and gazing at them as though seeing them for the first time.

81 Four Miles Within by Desmond Winter Hall

Far down into the earth goes a gleaming metal sphere whose passengers are deadly enemies.

Aproximate word count: 14,300

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

Chapter 1: The Monster of Metal

Far down into the earth goes a gleaming metal sphere whose passengers are deadly enemies.

A strange spherical monster stood in the moonlight on the silent Mojave Desert. In the ghostly gray of the sand and sage and joshua trees its metal hide glimmered dully—an amazing object to be found on that lonely spot. But there was only pride and anticipation in the eyes of the three people who stood a little way off, looking at it. For they had constructed the strange sphere, and were soon going to entrust

their lives to it.

"Professor," said one of them, a young man with a cheerful face and a likable grin, "let's go down now! There's no use waiting till to-morrow. It's always dark down there, whether it's day or night up here. Everything is ready."

The white-haired Professor David Guinness smiled tolerantly at the speaker, his partner, Phil Holmes. "I'm kind of eager to be off, myself," he admitted. He turned to the third person in the little group, a dark-haired girl. "What do you say, Sue?"

"Oh, let's, Father!" came the quick reply. "We'd never be able to sleep to-night, anyway. As Phil says, everything is ready."

"Well, I guess that settles it," Professor Guinness said to the eager young man.

Phil Holmes' face went aglow with anticipation.

"Good!" he cried. "Good! I'll skip over and get some water. It's barely possible that it'll be hot down there,

in spite of your eloquent logic to the contrary!" And with the words he caught up a large jug standing nearby, waved his hand, said: "I'll be right back!" and set out for the water-hole, situated nearly a mile away from their little camp. The heavy hush of the desert night settled down once more after he left.

As his figure merged with the shadows in the distance, the elderly scientist murmured aloud to his daughter:

"You know, it's good to realize that my dream is about to become a reality. If it hadn't been for Phil.... Or no—I really ought to thank you, Sue. You're the one responsible for his participation!" And he smiled fondly at the slender girl by his side.

"Phil joined us just for the scientific interest, and for the thrill of going four miles down into the earth," she retorted at once, in spite of the blush her father saw on her face. But he did not insist. Once more he turned, as to a magnet, to the machine that was his handiwork.

The fifteen-foot sphere was an earth-borer—Guinness's own invention. In it he had utilized for the first time for boring purposes the newly developed atomic disintegrators. Many holes equally spaced over the sphere were the outlets for the dissolving ray—most of them on the bottom and alternating with them on the bottom and sides were the outlets of powerful rocket propulsion tubes, which would enable it to rise easily from the hole it would presently blast into the earth. A small, tight-fitting door gave entrance to the double-walled interior, where, in spite of the space taken up by batteries and mechanisms and an enclosed gyroscope for keeping the borer on an even keel, there was room for several people.

The earth-borer had been designed not so much for scientific investigation as the specific purpose of reaching a rich store of radium ore buried four miles below the Guinness desert camp. Many geologists and mining engineers knew that the radium was there, for their instruments had proven it often; but no one up to then knew how to get to it. David Guinness did—first. The borer had been constructed in his

laboratory in San Francisco, then dismantled and freighted to the little desert town of Palmdale, from whence Holmes had brought the parts to their isolated camp by truck. Strict secrecy had been kept. Rather than risk assistants they had done all the work themselves.

Fifteen minutes passed by, while the slight figure of the inventor puttered about the interior of the sphere, brightly lit by a detachable searchlight, inspecting all mechanisms in preparation for their descent. Sue stood by the door watching him, now and then turning to scan the desert for the returning Phil.

It was then, startlingly sudden, that there cracked through the velvet night the faint, distant sound of a gun. And it came from the direction of the water-hole.

Sue's face went white, and she trembled. Without a word her father stepped out of the borer and looked at her.

"That was a gun!" he said. "Phil didn't have one with him, did he?"

"No," Sue whispered. "And—why, there's nobody within miles of here!"

The two looked at each other with alarm and wonder. Then, from one of the broken patches of scrub that ringed the space in which the borer stood, came a mocking voice.

"Ah, you're mistaken, Sue," it affirmed. "But that was a gun."

David Guinness jerked around, as did his daughter. The man who had spoken stood only ten yards away, clearly outlined in the bright moonlight—a tall, well-built man, standing quite at ease, surveying them pleasantly. His smile did not change when old Guinness cried:

"Quade! James Quade!"

The man nodded and came slowly forward. He might have been considered handsome, had it not been for his thin, mocking lips and a swarthy complexion.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Guinness angrily. "And what do you mean—'it was a gun?' Have you—"

"Easy, easy—one thing at a time," said Quade, still smiling. "About the gun—well, your young friend Holmes said, he'd be right back, but I—I'm afraid he won't be."

Sue Guinness's lips formed a frightened word:

"Why?"

Quade made a short movement with his left hand, as if brushing the query aside. "Let's talk about something more pleasant," he said, and looked back at the professor. "The radium, and your borer, for instance. I hear you're all ready to go down."

David Guinness gasped. "How did you know—?" he began, but a surge of anger choked him, and his fists clenched. He stepped forward. But something came to life in James Quade's right hand and pointed menacingly at him. It was the stubby black shape of

an automatic.

"Keep back, you old fool!" Quade said harshly. "I don't want to have to shoot you!"

Unwillingly, Guinness came to a stop. "What have you done with young Holmes?" he demanded.

"Never mind about him now," said Quade, smiling again. "Perhaps I'll explain later. At the moment there's something much more interesting to do. Possibly you'll be surprised to hear it, but we're all going to take a little ride in this machine of yours, Professor. Down. About four miles. I'll have to ask you to do the driving. You will, won't you—without making a fuss?"

Guinness's face worked furiously. "Why, you're crazy, Quade!" he sputtered. "I certainly won't!"

"No?" asked Quade softly. The automatic he held veered around, till it was pointing directly at the girl. "I wouldn't want to have to shoot Sue—say—through the hand...." His finger tightened perceptibly on the

trigger.

"You're mad, man!" Guinness burst out. "You're crazy! What's the idea—"

"In due time I'll tell you. But now I'll ask you just once more," Quade persisted. "Will you enter that borer, or must I—" He broke off with an expressive shrug.

David Guinness was powerless. He had not the slightest idea what Quade might be about; the one thought that broke through his fear and anger was that the man was mad, and had better be humored. He trembled, and a tight sensation came to his throat at sight of the steady gun trained on his daughter. He dared not trifle.

"I'll do it," he said.

James Quade laughed. "That's better. You always were essentially reasonable, though somewhat impulsive for a man of your age. The rash way you severed our partnership, for instance.... But enough of that. I think we'd better leave immediately. Into the sphere,

please. You first, Miss Guinness."

"Must she come?"

"I'm afraid so. I can't very well leave her here all unprotected, can I?"

Quade's voice was soft and suave, but an undercurrent of sarcasm ran through it. Guinness winced under it; his whole body was trembling with suppressed rage and indignation. As he stepped to the door of the earth-borer he turned and asked:

"How did you know our plans? About the radium?—the borer?"

Quade told him. "Have you forgotten," he said, "that you talked the matter over with me before we split last year? I simply had the laboratory watched, and when you got new financial backing from young Holmes, and came here. I followed you. Simple, eh?... Well, enough of this. Get inside. You first, Sue."

Trembling, the girl obeyed, and when her father

hesitated Quade jammed his gun viciously into his ribs and pushed him to the door. "Inside!" he hissed, and reluctantly, hatred in his eyes, the professor stepped into the control compartment after Sue. Quade gave a last quick glance around and, with gun ever wary, passed inside. The door slammed shut: there was a click as its lock shot over. The sphere was a sealed ball of metal.

Inside, David Guinness obeyed the automatic's imperious gesture and pulled a shiny-handled lever slowly back, and the hush that rested over the Mojave was shattered by a tremendous bellow, a roar that shook the very earth. It was the disintegrating blast, hurled out of the bottom in many fan-shaped rays. The coarse gray sand beneath the machine stirred and flew wildly; the sphere vibrated madly; and then the thunder lowered in tone to a mighty humming and the earth-borer began to drop. Slowly it fell, at first, then more rapidly. The shiny top came level with the ground: disappeared; and in a moment there was nothing left but a gaping hole where a short while before a round monster of metal had stood. The hole

was hot and dark, and from it came a steadily diminishing thunder....

For a long time no one in the earth-borer spoke—didn't even try to—for though the thunder of the disintegrators was muted, inside, to a steady drone, conversation was almost impossible. The three were crowded quite close in the spherical inner control compartment. Sue sat on a little collapsible stool by the bowed, but by no means subdued, figure of Professor David Guinness, while Quade sat on the wire guard of the gyroscope, which was in the exact center of the floor.

The depth gauge showed two hundred feet. Already the three people were numb from the vibration; they hardly felt any sensation at all, save one of great weight pressing inwards. The compartment was fairly cool and the air good—kept so by the automatic air rectifiers and the insulation, which shut out the heat born of their passage.

Quade had been carefully watching Guinness's manipulation of the controls, when he was struck by a

thought. At once he stood up, and shouted in the elderly inventor's ear: "Try the rockets! I want to be sure this thing will go back up!"

Without a word Guinness shoved back the lever controlling the disintegrators, at the same time whirling a small wheel full over. The thudding drone died away to a whisper, and was replaced by sharper thundering, as the stream of the propulsion rockets beneath the sphere was released. A delicate needle trembled on a gauge, danced at the figure two hundred, then crept back to one-ninety ... one-sixty ... one-forty.... Quade's eyes took in everything.

"Excellent, Guinness!" he yelled. "Now—down once more!"

The rockets were slowly cut; the borer jarred at the bottom of its hole; again the disintegrators droned out. The sphere dug rapidly into the warm ground, biting lower and lower. At ten miles an hour it blasted a path to depths hitherto unattainable to man, sweeping away rock and gravel and sand—everything that stood in its way. The depth gauge rose to two

thousand, then steadily to three and four. So it went on for nearly half an hour.

At the end of that time, at a depth of nearly four miles, Quade got stiffly to his feet and once more shouted into the professor's ear.

"We ought to be close to that radium, now," he said. "I think—"

But his words stopped short. The floor of the sphere suddenly fell away from their feet, and they felt themselves tumbled into a wild plunge. The drone of the disintegrators, hitherto muffled by the earth they bit into, rose to a hollow scream. Before the professor quite knew what was happening, there was a stunning crash, a shriek of tortured metal—and the earth-borer rocked and lay still....

The whole world seemed to be filled with thunder when David Guinness came back to consciousness. He opened his eyes and stared up into a darkness to which it took him some time to accustom himself. When he did, he made out hazily that he was lying on

the floor of a vast dark cavern. He could dimly see its jagged roof, perhaps fifty feet above. There was the strong smell of damp earth in his nostrils; his head was splitting from the steady drone in his ear-drums. Suddenly he remembered what had happened. He groaned slightly and tried to sit up.

But he could not. His arms and legs were tied. Someone had removed him from the earth-borer and bound him on the floor of the cavern they had plunged into.

David Guinness strained at the rope. It was futile, but in doing so he twisted his head around and saw another form, similarly tied, lying close to him. He gave a little cry of relief. It was Sue. And she was conscious, her eyes on his face.

She spoke to him, but he could not understand her for the drone in his ears, and when he spoke to her it was the same. But the professor did not just then continue his effort to converse with her. His attention was drawn to the borer, now dimly illuminated by its portable light, which had been secured to the door. It

was right side up, and appeared to be undamaged. The broad ray of the searchlight fell far away on one of the cavern's rough walls. He could just make out James Quade standing there, his back towards them.

He was hacking at the wall with a pick. Presently he dropped the tool and wrenched at the rock with bare hands. A large chunk came loose. He hugged it to him and turned and strode back towards the two on the floor, and as he drew near they could plainly see a gleam of triumph in his eyes.

"You know what this is?" he shouted. Guinness could only faintly hear him. "Wealth! Millions! Of course we always knew the radium was here, but this is the proof. And now we've a way of getting it out—thanks to your borer! All the credit is yours, Professor Guinness! You shall have the credit, and I'll have the money."

Guinness tugged furiously at his bonds again. "You—you—" he gasped. "How dare you tie us this way! Release us at once! What do you mean by it?"

Quade smiled unpleasantly. "You're very stupid, Guinness. Haven't you guessed by now what I'm going to do?" He paused, as if waiting for an answer, and the smile on his face gave way to a look of savage menace. For the first time his bitter feelings came to the surface.

"Have you forgotten how close I came to going to jail over those charges of yours a year ago?" he said.

"Have you forgotten the disgrace to me that followed?—the stigma that forced me to disappear for months? You fool, do you think I've forgotten?—or that I'd let you—"

"Quade," interrupted the older man, "you know very well you were guilty. I caught you red-handed. You didn't fool anyone—except the jury that let you go. So save your breath, and, if you've the sense you were born with, release my daughter and me. Why, you're crazy!" he cried with mounting anger. "You can't get away with this! I'll have you in jail within forty-eight hours, once I get back to the surface!"

With an effort Quade controlled his feelings and

assumed his oily, sarcastic manner. "That's just it," he said: "'once you get back!' How stupid you are! You don't seem to realize that you're not going back to the surface. You and your daughter."

Sue gasped, and her father's eyes went wide. There was a tense silence.

"You wouldn't dare!" the inventor cried finally. "You wouldn't dare!"

"It's rather large, this cavern," Quade went on. "You'll have plenty of room. Perhaps I'll untie you before I go back up, so—"

"You can't get away with it!" shouted the old man, tremendously excited. "Why, you can't, possibly! Philip Holmes'll track you down—he'll tell the police—he'll rescue us! And then—"

Quade smiled suavely. "Oh, no, he won't. Perhaps you remember the shot that sounded from the water-hole? Well, when I and my assistant, Juan, heard Holmes say he was going for water, I told Juan to follow him

to the water-hole and bind him, to keep him from interfering till I got back up. But Mr. Holmes is evidently of an impulsive disposition, and must have caused trouble. Juan, too, is impulsive; he is a Mexican. And he had a gun. I'm afraid he was forced to use it.... I am quite sure Philip Holmes will not, as you say, track me down."

David Guinness looked at his daughter's white face and horror-filled eyes and suddenly crumpled. Humbly, passionately, he begged Quade to take her back up. "Why, she's never done anything to you, Quade!" he pleaded. "You can't take her life like that! Please! Leave me, if you must, but not her! You can't —"

But suddenly the old man noticed that Quade was not listening. His head was tilted to one side as if he was straining to hear something else. Guinness was held silent for a moment by the puzzled look on the other's face and the strange way he was acting.

"Do you hear it?" Quade asked at last; and without waiting for an answer, he knelt down and put his ear

to the ground. When he rose his face was savage, and he cursed under his breath.

"Why, it's a humming!" muttered Professor Guinness.
"And it's getting louder!"

"It sounds like another borer!" ventured Sue.

The humming grew in volume. Then, from the ceiling, a rock dropped. They were looking at the cavern roof and saw it start, but they did not hear it strike, for the ever-growing humming echoed loudly through the cavern. They saw another rock fall; and another.

"For God's sake, what is it?" cried Guinness.

Quade looked at him and slowly drew out his automatic.

"Another earth-borer, I think," he answered. "And I rather expect it contains your young friend Mr. Holmes. Yes—coming to rescue you."

For a moment Guinness and his daughter were too

astounded to do anything but gape. She finally exclaimed:

"But—but then Phil's alive?"

James Quade smiled. "Probably—for the moment. But don't let your hopes rise too high. The borer he's in isn't strong enough to survive a fifty-foot plunge." He was shouting now, so loud was the thunder from above. "And," he added, "I'm afraid he's not strong enough to survive it, either!"

Chapter 2: The Man-Hunt

When Phil Holmes started off to the water-hole, his head was full of the earth-borer and the imminent descent. Now that the long-awaited time had come, he was at fever-pitch to be off, and it did not take him long to cover the mile of sandy waste. His thoughts were far inside the earth as he dipped the jug into the clear cool water and sloshed it full.

So the rope that snaked softly through the air and dropped in a loop over his shoulders came as a stark surprise. Before he knew what was happening it had slithered down over his arms and drawn taut just above the elbows, and he was yanked powerfully backwards and almost fell.

But he managed to keep his feet as he staggered backward, and turning his head he saw the small dark figure of his aggressor some fifteen feet away, keeping tight the slack.

Phil's surprise turned to sudden fury and he completely lost his head. What he did was rash; mad;

and yet, as it turned out, it was the only thing that could have saved him. Instinctively, without hesitating one second, and absolutely ignoring an excited command to stand still, he squirmed face-on to his aggressor, lowered his head and charged.

The distance was short. Halfway across it, a gun barked, and he heard the bullet crack into the water jug, which he was still holding in front of himself. And even before the splintered fragments reached the ground he had crashed into the firer.

He hit him with all the force of a tackling lineman, and they both went down. The man grunted as the wind was jarred out of him, but he wriggled like an eel and managed to worm aside and bring up his gun.

Then there was a desperate flurry of bodies in the coarse sand. Holmes dived frantically for the gun hand and caught it; but, handicapped as he was by the rope, he could not hold it. Slowly its muzzle bent upward to firing position.

Desperately, he wrenched the arm upwards, in the

direction it had been straining to go, and the sudden unexpected jerk doubled the man's arm and brought the weapon across his chest. For a moment there was a test of strength as Phil lay chest to chest over his opponent, the gun blocked between. Then the other grunted; squirmed violently—and there was a muffled explosion.

A cry of pain cut the midnight air, and with insane strength Holmes' ambusher fought free from his grip, staggered to his feet and went reeling away. Phil tore loose from the rope and bounded after him, never feeling, at the moment, his powder-burned chest.

And then he halted in his tracks.

A great roar came thundering over the desert!

At once he knew that it came from the earth-borer's disintegrators. The sphere had started down without him.

He stood stock still, petrified with surprise, facing the sound, while his attacker melted farther and farther

into the night. And then, suddenly, Phil Holmes was sprinting desperately back towards the Guinness camp.

He ran until he was exhausted; walked for a little while his legs gathered more strength, and his laboring lungs more air; and then ran again. As the minutes passed, the thunder lessened rapidly into a muffled drone; and by the time Phil had panted up to the brink of the hole that gaped where but a little time before the sphere was standing, it had become but a distant purr. He leaned far over and peered into the hot blackness below, but could see nothing.

Phil knelt there silently for some minutes, shocked by his strange attack, bewildered by the unexpected descent of the borer. For a time his mind would not work; he had no idea what to do. But gradually his thoughts came to order and made certain things clear.

He had been deliberately ambushed. Only by luck had he escaped, he told himself. If it hadn't been for the water jug, he'd now be out of the picture. And on the heels of the ambush had come the surprising descent

of the earth-borer. The two incidents coincided too well: the same mind had planned them. And two, men, at least, were in on the plot.... It suddenly became very clear to him that the answer to the puzzle lay with the man who had ambushed him. He would have to get that man. Track him down.

Phil acted with decision. He got to his feet and strode rapidly to the deserted Guinness shack, horribly quiet and lonely now in the bright moonlight. In a minute he emerged with a flashlight at his belt and a rifle across his arm.

Once again he went over to the new black hole in the desert and looked down. From far below still came the purr, now fainter than ever. His friend, the girl he loved, were down there, he reflected bitterly, and he was helpless to reach them. Well, there was one thing he could do—go man-hunting. Turning, he started off at a long lope for the water-hole.

Ten minutes later he was there, and off to the side he found the marks of their scuffle—and small black blotches that could be nothing but blood. The other

was wounded: could probably not get far. But he might still have his gun, so Phil kept his rifle handy, and tempered his impatience with caution as he set out on the trail of the widely spaced footprints.

They led off towards the nearby hills, and in the bright moonlight Phil did not use his flashlight at all, except to investigate other round black blotches that made a line parallel to the prints. As he went on he found his quarry's steps coming more closely together: becoming erratic. Soon they showed as painful drags in the sand, a laborious hauling of one foot after the other.... Phil put away his light and advanced very cautiously.

He wondered, as he went, who in the devil was behind it all. The radium-finding project had been kept strictly secret. Not another soul was supposed to know of the earth-borer and its daring mission into the heart of the earth. Yet, obviously, someone had found out, and whoever it was had laid at least part of his scheme cunningly. An old man and a girl cannot offer much resistance: he, Phil, would have been well taken care of had it not been for the water jug. So far,

there were at least two in the plot: the man who had ambushed him and the unknown who had evidently kidnapped both Professor and Sue Guinness. But there might be still more.

There might be friends, nearby, of the man he was tracking. The fellow might have reached them, and warned them that the scheme hadn't gone through, that Phil was loose. They could very easily conceal themselves alongside their partner's tracks and train their rifles on the tracker....

The trail was leading up into one of the cañons in the cluster of hills to the west. For some distance he followed it up through a slash of black below the steep moonlit heights of the hills to each side—and then, suddenly, he vaguely made out the forms of two huts just ahead.

Immediately he stooped low, and went skirting widely off up one side. He proceeded slowly, with great caution, his rifle at the ready. At any moment, he knew, the hush might be split by the cracks of waylaying guns. Warily he advanced along the narrow

cañon wall above the huts. No lights were lit, and the place seemed unoccupied. He was debating what to do next when his attention was attracted to a large dark object lying in the cañon trail some twenty yards from the nearest hut. Straining his eyes in the inadequate moonlight, he saw that it was the outstretched figure of a man. His quarry—his ambusher!

Phil dropped flat, fearful of being seen. Keeping as best he could in the shadows, fearing every moment to hear the sharp bark of a gun, he crawled forward. It took him a long time to approach the sprawled figure, but he wasn't taking chances. When within twenty feet, he rose suddenly and darted forward to the man's side.

His rapid glance showed him that the fellow was completely out: and another quick look around failed to show that anyone else was watching, so he returned to his examination of the man. It was the ambusher, all right: a Mexican. He was still breathing, though his face was drawn and white from the loss of blood from a wound under the blood-soaked clothing

near his upper right arm. A hasty search showed that he no longer had his gun, so Phil, satisfied that he was powerless for some time to come, cautiously wormed his way towards the two shacks.

There was something sinister in the strange silence that hung over them. One was of queer construction—a windowless, square, high box of galvanized iron. The other was obviously a dwelling place. Carefully Phil sneaked up to the latter. Then, rifle ready, he pushed its door open and sent a beam of light stabbing through the darkness of the interior.

There was no one there. Only two bunks, a table, chair, a pail of water and some cooking utensils met his view. He crept out toward the other building.

Come close, Phil found that a dun-colored canvas had been thrown over the top of it, making an adequate camouflage in daytime. The place was about twenty feet high. He prowled around the metal walls and discovered a rickety door. Again, gun ready, he flung it open. The beam from his flash speared a path through the blackness—and he gasped at sight of

what stood revealed.

There, inside, was a long, bullet-like tube of metal, the pointed end upper-most, and the bottom, which was flat, toward the ground. It was held in a wooden cradle, and was slanted at the floor. In the bottom were holes of two shapes—rocket tubes and disintegrating projectors. It was another earth-borer.

Phil stood frozen with surprise before this totally unlooked-for machine. He could easily have been overcome, had the owner been in the building, for he had forgotten everything but what his eyes were staring at. He started slowly around the borer, found a long narrow door slightly ajar, and stepped inside.

This borer, like Guinness's, had a double shell, and much the same instruments, though the whole job was simpler and cruder. A small instrument board contained inclination, temperature, depth and air-purity indicators, and narrow tubes led to the air rectifiers. But what kept Holmes' attention were the wires running from the magneto to the mixing chambers of the disintegrating tubes.

"The fools!" he exclaimed, "—they didn't know how to wire the thing! Or else," he added after a moment, "didn't get around to doing it." He noticed that the projectile's interior contained no gyroscope: though, he thought, none would be needed, for the machine, being long and narrow, could not change keel while in the ground. Here he was reminded of something. Stepping outside, he estimated the angle the borer made with the dirt floor. Twenty degrees. "And pointed southwest!" he exclaimed aloud. "This borer would come close to meeting the professor's, four miles under our camp!"

At once he knew what he would do. First he went back to the other shack and got the pail of water he had noticed, and took this out where the Mexican lay outstretched. He bathed the man's face and the still slightly bleeding bullet wound in his shoulder.

Presently the wounded man came to. His eyes opened, and he stared up into a steel mask of a face, in which two level black eyes bored into his. He remembered that face—remembered it all too well. He trembled, cowered away.

"No!" he gasped, as if he had seen a ghost. "No—no!"

"Yes, I'm the man," Holmes told him firmly, menacingly. "The same one you tried to ambush." He paused a moment, then said: "Do you want to live?"

It was a simple question, frightening in its simplicity.

"Because if you don't answer my questions, I'm going to let you lie here," Phil went on coldly. "And that would probably mean your death. If you do answer, I'll fix you up so you can have a chance."

The Mexican nodded eagerly. "I talk," he said.

"Good," said Phil. "Then tell me who built that machine?"

"Señor Quade. Señor James Quade."

"Quade!" Phil had heard the name before. "Of course!" he said. "Guinness's old partner!"

"I not know," the Mexican answered. "He hire me with

much money. He buy thees machine inside, and we put him together. But he could no make him work—it take too long. We watch, hear old man go down to-night, and—"

The greaser stopped. "And so he sent you to get me, while he kidnapped the old man and his daughter and forced them under the ground in their own borer," Holmes supplied, and the other nodded.

"But I only mean to tie you!" he blurted, gesturing weakly. "I no mean shoot! No, no—"

"All right—forget it," Phil interrupted. "And now tell me what Quade expects to do down there."

"I not know, Señor," came the hesitant reply, "but...."

"But what?" the young man jerked.

Reluctantly the wounded Mexican continued. "Señor Quade—he—I think he don' like thees old man. I think he leave heem an' the girl down below. Then he come up an' say they keeled going down."

Phil nodded grimly. "I see," he said, voicing his thoughts. "Then he would say that he and Professor Guinness are still partners—and the radium ore will belong to him. Very nice. Very nice...."

He snapped back to action, and without another word hoisted the Mexican onto his back and carried him into the shack. There he cleansed the wound, rigged up a tight bandage for it, and tied the man to one of the cots. He tied him in such a fashion that he could reach some food and water he put by the cot.

"You leave me like thees?" the Mexican asked.

"Yes," Phil said, and started for the door.

"But what you going to do?"

Phil smiled grimly as he flung an answer back over his shoulder.

"Me?—I'm going to fix the wiring on those disintegrators in your friend Quade's borer. Then I'm starting down after him." He stopped and turned

before he closed the door. "And if I don't get back—well, it's just too bad for you!"

And so, a little later, once more the hushed desert night was cleft by a furious bellow of sound. It came, this time, from a narrow cañon. The steep sides threw the roar back and back again, and the echoes swelled to an earth-shaking blast of sound. The oblong hut from which it came rocked and almost fell; then, as the noise began to lessen, teetered on its foundations and half-slipped into the ragged hole that had been bored inside.

The descent was a nightmare that Holmes would never forget. Quade's machine was much cruder and less efficient than the sphere David Guinness had designed. Its protecting insulation proved quite inadequate, and the heat rapidly grew terrific as the borer dug down. Phil became faint, stifled, and his body oozed streams of sweat. And the descent was also bumpy and uneven; often he was forced to leave the controls and work on the mechanism of the disintegrators when they faltered and threatened to stop. But in spite of everything the needle on the

depth gauge gradually swung over to three thousand, and four, and five....

After the first mile Holmes improvised a way to change the air more rapidly, and it grew a little cooler. He watched the story the depth gauge told with narrowed eyes, and, as it reached three miles, inspected his rifle. At three and a half miles he stopped the borer, thinking to try to hear the noise made by the other, but so paralyzed were his eardrums from the terrific thunder beneath, it seemed hardly any quieter when it ceased.

His plans were vague; they would have to be made according to the conditions he found. There was a coil of rope in the tube-like interior of the borer, and he hoped to find a cavern or cleft in the earth for lateral exploring. He would stop at a depth of four miles—where he should be very near the path of the professor's sphere.

But Phil never saw the needle on the gauge rise to four miles. At three and three quarters came sudden catastrophe.

He knew only that there was an awful moment of utter helplessness, when the borer swooped wildly downwards, and the floor was snatched sickeningly from under him. He was thrown violently against the instrument panel; then up toward the pointed top; and at the same instant came a rending crash that drove his senses from him....

Chapter 3: "*You Haven't the Guts*"

"Faust as I thought," said James Quade in the silence that fell when the last echoes had died away, and the splinters of steel and rock had settled. "You see, Professor, this earth-borer belongs to me. Yes, I built one too. But I couldn't, unfortunately, get it working properly—that is, in time to get down here first. After all, I'm not a scientist, and remembered little enough of your borer's plans.... It's probably young Holmes who's dropped in on us. Shall we see?"

David Guinness and his daughter were speechless with dread. Quade had trained the searchlight on the borer, and by turning their heads they could see it plainly. It was all too clear that the machine was a total wreck. It had pitched over onto one side, its shell cracked and mangled irreparably. Grotesque pieces of crumpled metal lay all around it. Its slanting course had tumbled it within fifteen yards of the sphere.

In silence the old man and the girl watched Quade walk deliberately over to it, his automatic steady in

his right hand. He wrenched at the long, narrow door, but it was so badly bent that for a while he could not get it open. At last it swung out, however, and Quade peered inside.

After a moment he reached in and drew out a rifle. He took it over to a nearby rock, smashed the gun's breech, then flung it, useless, aside. Returning to the borer, he again peered in.

Sue was about to scream from the torturous suspense when he at last straightened up and looked around at the white-faced girl and her father.

"Mr. Holmes is tougher than I'd thought possible," he said, with a thin smile; "he's still alive." And, as Sue gasped with relief, he added: "Would you like to see him?"

He dragged the young man's unconscious body roughly out on the floor. There were several bad bruises on his face and head, but otherwise he was apparently uninjured. As Quade stood over him, playing idly with the automatic, he stirred, and

blinked, and at last, with an effort, got up on one elbow and looked straight at the thin lips and narrowed eyes of the man standing above. He shook his head, trying to comprehend, then muttered hazily:

"You—you're—Quade?"

Quade did not have time to answer, for Sue Guinness cried out:

"Phil! Are you all right?"

Phil stared stupidly around, caught sight of the two who lay bound on the floor, and staggered to his feet. "Sue!" he cried, relief and understanding flooding his voice. He started towards her.

"Stand where you are!" Quade snapped harshly, and the automatic in his hand came up. Holmes peered at it and stopped, but his blood-streaked face settled into tight lines, and his body tensed.

"You'd better," continued Quade. "Now tell me what happened to Juan."

Phil forced himself to be calm. "Your pal, the greaser?" he said cuttingly. "He's lying on a bunk in your shack. He shot himself, playing with a gun."

Quade chose not to notice the way Phil said this, but a little of the suave self-confidence was gone from his face as he said: "Well, in that case I'll have to hurry back to the surface to attend to him. But don't be alarmed," he added, more brightly. "I'll be back for you all in an hour or so."

At this, David Guinness struggled frantically with his bonds and yelled:

"Don't believe him, Phil! He's going to leave us here, to starve and die! He told us so just before you came down!"

Quade's face twitched perceptibly. His eyes were nervous.

"Is that true, Quade?" Holmes asked. There was a steely note in his voice.

"Why—no, of course not," the other said hastily, uncertain whether to lie or not. "Of course I didn't!"

Phil Holmes looked square into his eyes. He bluffed.

"You couldn't desert us, Quade. You haven't the guts. You haven't the guts."

His face and eyes burned with the contempt that was in his words. It cut Quade to the raw. But he could not avoid Phil's eyes. He stared at them for a full moment, trembling slightly. Slowly, by inches, he started to back toward the sphere; then suddenly he ran for it with all his might, Holmes after him. Quade got to it first, and inside, as he yanked in the searchlight and slammed and locked the door, he yelled:

"You'll see, you damned pup! You'll see!" And there was the smothered sound of half-maniacal laughter....

Phil threw all his weight against the metal door, but it was hopeless and he knew it. He had gathered himself for another rush when he heard Guinness yell:

"Back, Phil—back! He'll turn on the side disintegrators!"

Mad with rage as the young man was, he at once saw the danger and leaped away—only to almost fall over the professor's prone body. With hurrying, trembling fingers he untied the pair's bonds, and they struggled to their feet, cramped and stiff. Then it was Phil who warned them.

"Back as far as you can! Hurry!" He grabbed Sue's hand and plunged toward the uncertain protection of a huge rock far in the rear. At once he made them lie flat on the ground.

As yet the sphere had not stirred nor emitted a whisper of sound, though they knew the man inside was conning the controls in a fever of haste to leave the cavern. But they hadn't long to wait. There came a sputter, a starting cough from the rocket tubes beneath the sphere. Quickly they warmed into life, and the dully glimmering ball rocked in the hole it lay in. Then a cataract of noise unleashed itself; a devastating thunder roared through the echoing

cavern as the rockets burst into full force. A wave of brilliant orange-red splashed out from under the sphere, licked back up its sides, and seemed literally to shove the great ball up towards the hole in the ceiling.

Its ascent was very slow. As it gained height it looked—save for its speed—like a fantastic meteor flaming through the night, for the orange plumage that streamed from beneath lit the ball with dazzling color. A glowing sphere, it staggered midway between floor and ceiling, creeping jerkily upwards.

"He's not going to hit the hole!" shouted Guinness.

The borer had not risen in a perfectly straight line; it jarred against the rim of the hole, and wavered uncertainly. Every second the roar of its rockets, swollen by echoes, rose in a savage crescendo; the faces of the three who watched were painted orange in the glow.

The sphere was blind. The man inside could judge his course only by the feel. As the three who were

deserted watched, hoping ardently that Quade would not be able to find the opening, the left side-rockets spouted lances of fire, and they knew he had discovered the way to maneuver the borer laterally. The new flames welded with the exhaust of the main tubes into a great fan-shaped tail, so brilliant and shot through with other colors that their eyes could not stand the sight, except in winks. The borer jerked to the right, but still it could not find the hole. Then the flames lessened for a moment, and the borer sank down, to rise again a moment later. Its ascent was so labored that Phil shouted to Professor Guinness:

"Why so slow?"

And the inventor told him that which he had not seen for the intolerable light.

"Only half his rockets are on!"

This time the sphere was correctly aimed, however, and it roared straight into the hole. Immediately the fierce sound of the exhaust was muffled, and in a few seconds only the fiery plumage, shooting down from

the ceiling, showed where the machine was. Then this disappeared, and the noise alone was left.

Phil leaped forward, intending to stare up, but Guinness's yell halted him.

"Not yet! He might still use the disintegrators!"

For many minutes they waited, till the muffled exhaust had died to a drone. There was a puzzled expression on the professor's face as the three at last walked over and dared peer up into the hole. Far above, the splash of orange lit the walls of the tunnel.

"That's funny!" the old man muttered. "He's only using half the rockets—about ten. I thought he'd turn them all on when he got into the hole, but he didn't. Either they were damaged in the fall, or Quade doesn't see fit to use them."

"Half of them are enough," said Phil bitterly, and put his arm around the quiet girl standing next to him. Together, a silent little group, they watched the spot of orange die to a pin-point; watched it waver,

twinkle, ever growing smaller.... And then it was gone.

Gone! Back to the surface of the earth, to the normal world of reality. Only four miles above them—a small enough distance on the surface itself—and yet it might have been a million miles, so utterly were they barred from it....

The same thought was in their minds, though none of them dared express it. They were thinking of the serene desert, and the cool wind, and the buttes and the high hills, placid in the moonlight. Of the hushed rise of the dawn, the first flush of the sun that was so achingly lovely on the desert. The sun they would never see again, buried in a lifeless world of gloom four miles within.... And buried alive—and not alive for long....

But that way lay madness. Phil Holmes drove the horrible thoughts from his brain and forced a smile to his face.

"Well, that's that!" he said in a voice meant to be

cheerful.

The dim cavern echoed his words mockingly. With the earth-borer gone—the man-made machine that had dared break a solitude undisturbed since the earth first cooled—the great cavern seemed to return to its awful original mood. The three dwarfed humans became wholly conscious of it. They felt it almost a living thing, stretching vastly around them, tightening its unheard spell on them. Its smell, of mouldy earth and rocks down which water slowly dripped, filled their nostrils and somehow added to their fear.

As they looked about, their eyes became accustomed to the dim, eery, phosphorescent illumination. They saw little worm-like creatures now and again appear from tiny holes between stalagmites in the jagged floor; and, as Phil wondered in his mind how long it would be before they would be reduced to using them for food, a strange mole-sized animal scraped from the darkness and pecked at one of them. As it slithered away, a writhing shape in its mouth, Holmes muttered bitterly: "A competitor!" Vague, flitting forms haunted the gloom among the stalactites of the

distorted ceiling—hints of the things that lived in the terrible silence of this nether world. Here Time had paused, and life had halted in primate form.

A little moan came from Sue Guinness's pale lips. She plucked at her arm; a sickly white worm, only an inch long, had fallen on it from the ceiling. "Oh!" she gasped. "Oh!"

Phil drew her closer to him, and walked with her over to Quade's wrecked borer. "Let's see what we've got here," he suggested cheerfully.

The machine was over on its side, the metal mangled and crushed beyond repair. Nevertheless, he squeezed into it. "Stand back!" he warned. "I'm going to try its rockets!" There was a click of broken machinery, and that was all. "Rockets gone," Phil muttered.

He pulled another lever over. There was a sputter from within the borer, then a furious roar that sent great echoes beating through the cavern. A cloud of dust reared up before the bottom of the machine,

whipped madly for a moment, and sank as the bellow of sound died down. Sue saw that a rocky rise in the floor directly in front of the disintegrators had been planed off levelly.

Phil scrambled out. "The disintegrators work," he said, "but a lot of good they do us. The borer's hopelessly cracked." He shrugged his shoulders, and with a discouraged gesture cast to the ground a coil of rope he had found inside.

Then suddenly he swung around. "Professor!" he called to the old figure standing bowed beneath the hole in the ceiling. "There's a draft blowing from somewhere! Do you feel it?"

Guinness felt with his hands a moment and nodded slowly. "Yes," he said.

"It's coming from this way!" Sue said excitedly, pointing into the darkness on one side of the cavern. "And it goes up the hole we made in the ceiling!"

Phil turned eagerly to the old inventor. "It must come

from somewhere," he said, "and that somewhere may take us toward the surface. Let's follow it!"

"We might as well," the other agreed wearily. His was the tone of a man who has only a certain time to live.

But Phil was more eager. "While there's life, there's hope," he said cheerfully. "Come on, Sue, Professor!" And he led the way forward toward the dim, distorted rock shapes in the distance.

The roof and sides of the cavern angled down into a rough, tunnel-like opening, from which the draft swept. It was a heavy air, weighted with the smell of moist earth and lifeless water and a nameless, flat, stale gas. They slowly made their way through the impeding stalagmites, surrounded by a dark blur of shadows, the ghostly phosphorescent light illuminating well only the few rods around them. Utter silence brooded over the tunnel.

Phil paused when they had gone about seventy-five feet. "I left that rope behind," he said, "and we may need it. I'll return and get it, and you both wait right

here." With the words he turned and went back into the shadows.

He went as fast as he could, not liking to leave the other two alone. But when he had retrieved the rope and tied it to his waist, he permitted himself a last look up as he passed under the hole in the ceiling—and what he saw there tensed every muscle in his body, and made his heart beat like mad. Again there was a tiny spot of orange in the blackness above!

"Professor!" he yelled excitedly. "Sue! Come here! The sphere's coming back!"

There was no doubt about it. The pin-point of light was growing each second, with the flame of the descending exhausts. Guinness and his daughter ran from the tunnel, and, guided by Phil's excited ejaculations, hurried to his side. Their eyes confirmed what his had seen. The earth-borer was coming down!

"But," Guinness said bewilderedly, "those rockets were enough to lift him!"

This was a mystery. Even though ten rockets were on—ten tiny spots of orange flame—the sphere came down swiftly. The same force which some time before had lifted it slowly up was now insufficient. The roar of the tubes rose rapidly. "Get back!" Phil ordered, remembering the danger, and they all retreated to the mouth of the tunnel, ready to peep cautiously around the edge. Holmes' jaws were locked tight with grim resolution. Quade was coming back! he told himself exultantly. This time he must not go up alone! This time—!

But his half-formed resolutions were idle. He could not know what frightful thing was bringing Quade down—what frightful experience was in store for them all....

Chapter 4: Spawn of the Cavern

In a crescendo of noise that stunned their ears, the earth-borer came down. Tongues of fire flared from the hole, speared to the ground and were deflected upward, cradling the metal ball in a wave of flame. Through this fiery curtain the machine slowly lowered to the floor, where a shower of sparks spattered out, blinding the eyes of the watchers with their brilliance. For a full minute the orange-glowing sphere lay there, quivering from the vibration; then the exhausts died and the wave of flame wavered and sank into nothingness. While their ear-drums continued the thunder, the three stared at the borer, not daring to approach, yet striving to solve the mystery of why it had sunk despite the up-thrust of ten rocket tubes.

As their eyes again became accustomed to the familiar phosphorescent illumination, pallid and cold after the fierce orange flame, they saw why—and their eyes went wide with surprise and horror.

A strange mass was covering the top of the earth-borer—something that looked like a heap of viscid,

whitish jelly. It was sprawled shapelessly over the round upper part of the metal sphere, a half-transparent, loathsome stuff, several feet thick in places.

And Phil Holmes, striving to understand what it could be, saw an awful thing. "It's moving!" he whispered, unconsciously drawing Sue closer. "There's—there's life in it!"

Lazy quiverings were running through the mound of jelly, pulsings that gave evidence of its low organism. They saw little ripples of even beat run over it, and under them steady, sluggish convulsions that told of life; that showed, perhaps, that the thing was hungry and preparing to move its body in quest of food.

It was alive, unquestionably. The borer lay still, but this thing moved internally, of itself. It was life in its lowest, most primate form. The mass was mind, stomach, muscle and body all in one, stark and raw before their startled eyes.

"Oh, God!" Phil whispered through the long pause. "It

can't be real!..."

"Protoplasm—a monster amoeba," David Guinness's curiously cracked voice said. "Just as it exists on the surface, only microscopically. Primate life...."

The lock of the earth-borer clicked. Phil gasped.

"Quade is coming out!" he said. A little cry of horror came from Sue. And the metal door opened.

James Quade stepped through, automatic in hand. He was fresh from the light inside, and he could not see well. He was quite unconscious of what was oozing down on him from above, of the flabby heap that was carefully stretching down for him. He peered into the gloom, looking for the three he had deserted, and all the time an arm from the mass above crept nearer.

Sue Guinness's nerves suddenly gave, and she shrieked; but Quade's ears were deaf from the borer's thunder, and he did not hear her.

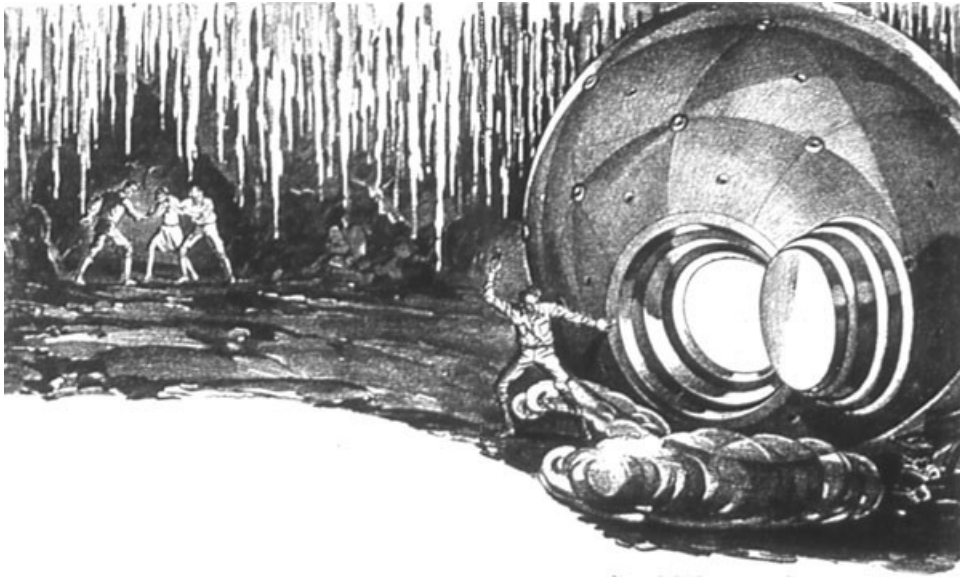
It was when he lifted one foot back into the sphere—probably to get out the searchlight—that he felt the thing's presence. He looked up—and a strange sound

came from him. For seconds he apparently could not move, stark fear rooting him to the ground, the gun limp in his hand.

Then a surge ran through the mound of flesh, and the arm, a pseudopod, reached more rapidly for him.

It stung Quade into action. He leaped back, brought up his automatic, and fired at the thing once; then three times more. He, and each one of the others, saw four bullets thud into the heap of pallid matter and heard them clang on the metal of the sphere beneath. They had gone right through its flesh—but they showed no slightest effect!

Quade was evidently unwilling to leave the sphere. Jerking his arm up he brought his trigger finger back again. A burst of three more shots barked through the cavern, echoing and re-echoing. The man screamed an inarticulate oath as he saw how useless his bullets were, and hurled the empty gun at the monster—which was down on the floor now, and bunching its sluggish body together.



The automatic went right into it. They could all see it there, in the middle of the amorphous body, while the creature stopped, as if determining whether or not it was food. Quade screwed his courage together in the pause, and tried to dodge past to the door of the sphere; but the monster was alert: another pseudopod sprang out from its shapeless flesh, sending him back on his heels.

The feeler had all but touched Quade, and with the closeness of his escape, the remnants of his courage gave. He yelled, and turned and ran.

He ran straight for the three who watched from the tunnel mouth, and the mound of shapeless jelly came

fast on his trail. It came in surging rolls, like thick fluid oozing forward; it would have been hard to measure its size, for each moment it changed. The only impression the four humans had was that of a wave of half-transparent matter that one instant was a sticky ball of viscid flesh and the next a rapidly advancing crescent whose horns reached far out on each flank to cut off retreat.

By instinct Phil jerked Sue around and yelled at the professor to run, for the old man seemed to be frozen into an attitude of fearful interest. Bullets would not stop the thing—could anything? Holmes wondered. He could visualize all too easily the death they would meet if that shapeless, naked protoplasmic mass overtook and flowed over them....

But he wasted no time with such thoughts. They ran, all three, into the dark tunnel.

Quade caught up with them quickly. Personal enmity was suspended before this common peril. They could not run at full speed, for a multitude of obstacles hindered them. Tortuous ridges of rock lay directly

across their path, formations that had been whipped in some mad, eon-old convulsion and then, through the ages, remained frozen into their present distortion; black pits gaped suddenly before them; half-seen stalagmites, whose crystalline edges were razor-sharp, tore through to their flesh. Haste was perilous where every moment they might stumble into an unseen cleft and go pitching into awful depths below. They were staking everything on the draft that blew steadily in their faces; Phil told himself desperately that it must lead to some opening—it must!

But what if the opening were a vertical, impassable tunnel? He would not think of that....

Old David Guinness tired fast, and was already lagging in the rear when Quade gasped hoarsely:

"Hurry! It's close behind!"

Surging rapidly at a constant distance behind them, it came on. It was as fast as they were, and evidently untiring. It was in its own element; obstacles meant

nothing to it. It oozed over the jagged ridges that took the humans precious moments to scramble past, and the speed of its weird progress seemed to increase as theirs faltered. It was a heartless mass driven inexorably by primal instinct towards the food that lay ahead. The dim phosphorescent illumination tinged its flabby tissues a weird white.

The passage they stumbled through narrowed. Long irregular spears of stalactites hung from the unseen ceiling; others, the drippings of ages, pronged up from the floor, shredding their clothes as they jarred into them. One moment they were clambering up-hill, slipping on the damp rock; the next they were sliding down into unprobed darkness, reckless of where they would land. They were aware only that the water-odorous draft was still in their faces, and the hungry mound of flesh behind....

"I can't last much longer!" old Guinness's winded voice gasped. "Best leave me behind. I—I might delay it!"

For answer, Phil went back, grabbed him by the arm

and dragged his tired body forward. He was snatching a glance behind to see how close the monster was, when Sue's frightened voice reached him from ahead.

"There's a wall here, Phil—and no way through!"

And then Holmes came to it. It barred the passage, and was apparently unbroken. Yet the draft still came!

"Search for where the draft enters!" he yelled. "You take that side!" And he started feeling over the clammy, uneven surface, searching frantically for a cleft. It seemed to be hopeless. Quade stood staring back into the gloom, his eyes looking for what he knew was surging towards them. His face had gone sickly white, he was trembling as if with fever, and he sucked in air with long, racking gasps.

"Here! I have it!" cried the girl suddenly at her end of the wall. The other three ran over, and saw, just above her head, a narrow rift in the rock, barely wide enough to squirm through. "Into it!" Phil ordered tersely. He grasped her, raised her high, and she

wormed through. Quade scrambled to get in next, but Holmes shoved him aside and boosted the old man through. Then he helped the other.

A second after he had swung himself up, a wave of whitish matter rolled up below, hungry pseudopods reaching for the food it knew was near. It began to trickle up the wall....

The crack was narrow and jagged; utterly black. Phil could hear Quade frantically worming himself ahead, and he wondered achingly if it would lead anywhere. Then a faint, clear voice from ahead rang out:

"It's opening up!"

Sue's voice! Phil breathed more easily. The next moment Quade scrambled through; dim light came; and they were in another vast, ghostly-lit cavern.

The crack came out on its floor-level; Guinness was resting near, and his daughter had her hands on a large boulder of rock. "Let's shove it against the hole!" she suggested to Phil. "It might stop it!"

"Good, Sue, good!" he exclaimed, and at once all four of them strained at the chunk, putting forth every bit of strength they had. The boulder stirred, rolled over, and thudded neatly in front of the crack, almost completely sealing it. There was only a cleft of five inches on one side.

But their expression of relief died in their throats. A tiny trickle of white appeared through the niche. The amorphous monster was compressing itself to a single stream, thin enough to squeeze through even that narrow space.

They could not block it. They had nothing to attack it with. There was nothing to do but run.... And hope for a chance to double back....

As nearly as they could make out, this second cavern was as large as the first. They could dimly see the fantastic shapes of hundreds of stalactites hanging from the ceiling. Clumps of stalagmites made the floor a maze which they threaded painfully. The strong steady draft guided them like a radio beacon, leading them to their only faint hope of escape and

life. Guinness, very tired, staggered along mechanically, a heavy weight on Phil's supporting arm; James Quade ran here and there in frantic spurts of speed. Sue was silent, but the hopelessness in her eyes tortured Phil like a wound. His shirt had long since been ripped to shreds; his face, bruised in the first place by the borer he had crashed in, now was scratched and bloody from contact with rough stalagmites.

Then, without warning, they suddenly found among the rough walls on the far side of the cavern, the birthplace of the draft. It lay at the edge of the floor—a dark hole, very wide. Black, sinister and clammy from the draft that poured from it, it pierced vertically down into the very bowels of the earth. It was impassable.

James Quade crumpled at the brink; "It's the end!" he moaned. "We can't go farther! It's the end of the draft!"

The hole blocked their forward path completely. They could not go ahead.... In seconds, it seemed, the

slithering that told of the monster's approach sounded from behind. Sue's eyes were already fixed on the awful, surging mass when a voice off to one side yelled:

"Here! Quick!"

It was Phil Holmes. He had been scouting through the gloom, and had found something.

The other three ran to him. "There's another draft going through here," he explained rapidly, pointing to an angled crevice in the rocky wall. "There's a good chance it goes to the cavern where the sphere and the hole to the surface are. Anyway, we've got to take it. I'd better go first, after this—and you, Quade, last. I trust you less than the monster behind."

He turned and edged into the crack, and the others followed as he had ordered. Quickly the passageway broadened, and they found the going much easier than it had been before. For perhaps ten minutes they scrambled along, with the draft always on their backs and the blessed, though faint, fire of hope kindling

again. In all that time they did not see their pursuer once, and the hope that they had lost it brought a measure of much needed optimism to drive their tired bodies onward. They found but few time-wasting obstacles. If only the tunnel would continue right into the original cavern! If only their path would stay clear and unhindered!

But it did not. The sound of Phil's footsteps ahead stopped, and when Sue and her father came up they saw why.

"A river!" Phil said.

They were standing on a narrow ledge that overhung an underground river. A fetid smell of age-old, lifeless water rose from it. Dimly, at least fifty feet across, they could see the other side, shrouded in vague shadows. The inky stream beneath did not seem to move at all, but remained smooth and hard and thick-looking.

They could not go around it. The ledge was only a few feet wide, and blocked at each side.

"Got to cross!" Phil said tersely.

Quade, sickly-faced, stared down. "There—there might be other things in that water!" he gasped. "Monsters!"

"Sure," agreed Phil contemptuously. "You'd better stay here." He turned to the others. "I'll see how deep it is," he said, and without the faintest hesitation dove flatly in.

Oily ripples washed back, and they saw his head poke through, sputtering. "Not deep," he said. "Chest-high. Come on."

He reached for Sue, helped her down, and did the same for her father. Holding each by the hand, Sue's head barely above the water, he started across. They had not gone more than twenty feet when they heard Quade, left on the bank, give a hoarse yell of fear and dive into the water. Their dread pursuer had caught up with them.

And it followed—on the water! Phil had hoped it

would not be able to cross, but once more the thing's astounding adaptability dashed his hopes. Without hesitation, the whitish jelly sprawled out over the water, rolling after them with ghastly, snake-like ripples, its pallid body standing out gruesomely against the black, odorous tide.

Quade came up thrashing madly, some feet to the side of the other three. He was swimming—and swimming with such strength that he quickly left them behind. He would be across before they; and that meant there was a good chance that the earth-borer would go up again with only one passenger....

Phil fought against the water, pulling Sue and her father forward as best he could. From behind came the rippling sound of their shapeless pursuer. "Ten feet more—" Holmes began—then abruptly stopped.

There had been a swish, a ripple upstream. And as their heads turned they saw the water part and a black head, long, evil, glistening, pointing coldly down to where they were struggling towards the shore. Phil Holmes felt his strength ooze out. He heard Professor

Guinness gasp:

"A water-snake!"

Its head was reared above the surface, gliding down on them silently, leaving a wedge of long, sluggish ripples behind. When thirty feet away the glistening head dipped under, and a great half-circle of leg-thick body arched out. It was like an oily stream of curved cable; then it ended in a pointed tail—and the creature was entirely under water....

With desperate strength Phil hauled the girl to the bank and, standing in several feet of water, pushed her up. Then he whirled and yanked old Guinness past him up into the hands of his daughter. With them safe, and Sue reaching out her hand for him, he began to scramble up himself.

But he was too late. There was a swish in the water behind him, and toothless, hard-gummed jaws clamped tight over one leg and drew him back and under. And with the touch of the creature's mouth a stiff shock jolted him; his body went numb; his arms

flopped limply down. He was paralyzed.

Sue Guinness cried out. Her father stared helplessly at the spot where his young partner had disappeared with so little commotion.

"It was an eel," he muttered dully. "Some kind of electric eel...."

Phil dimly realized the same thing. A moment later his face broke the surface, but he could not cry out; he could not move his little finger. Only his involuntary muscles kept working—his heart and his lungs. He found he could control his breathing a little.... And then he was wondering why he was remaining motionless on the surface. Gradually he came to understand.

He had not felt it, but the eel had let go its hold on his leg, and had disappeared. But only for a moment. Suddenly, from somewhere near, its gleaming body writhed crazily, and a terrific twist of its tail hit Phil a glancing blow on the chest. He was swept under, and the water around him became a maelstrom. When

next he bobbed to the tumultuous surface, he managed to get a much-needed breath of air—and in the swirling currents glimpsed the long, snake-like head of the eel go shooting by, with thin trickles of stuff that looked like white jelly clinging to it.

That explained what was happening. The eel had been challenged by the ameboid monster, and they were fighting for possession of him—the common prey.

The water became an inferno of whipping and lashing movements, of whitish fibers and spearing thrusts of a glistening black electric body. Unquestionably the eel was using its numbing electric shock on its foe. Time and time again Phil felt the amoeba grasp him, searingly, only to be wrenched free by the force of the currents the combat stirred up. Once he thudded into the bottom of the river, and his lungs seemed about to burst before he was again shot to the top and managed to get a breath. At last the water quieted somewhat, and Phil, at the surface, saw the eel bury its head in a now apathetic mound of flesh.

It tore a portion loose with savage jaws, a portion that

still writhed after it was separated from the parent mass; and then the victor glided swiftly downstream, and disappeared under the surface....

Holmes floated helplessly on the inky water. He could see the amoeba plainly; it was still partly paralyzed, for it was very still. But then a faint tremor ran through it; a wave ran over its surface—and it moved slowly towards him once again.

Desperately Phil tried to retreat. The will was there, but the body would not work. Save for a feeble flutter of his hands and feet, he could not move. He could not even turn around to bid Sue and David Guinness good-by—with his eyes....

Then a fresh, loved voice sounded just behind him, and he felt something tighten around his waist.

"It's all right, dear!" the voice called. "Hang on; we'll get you out!"

Sue had come in after him! She had grasped the rope tied to his belt, and she and her father were pulling

him back to the bank!

He wanted to tell her to go back—the amoeba was only feet away—but he could only manage a little croak. And then he was safe up on the ledge at the other side of the river.

A surge of strength filled his limbs, and he knew the shock was rapidly wearing off. But it was also wearing off of the monster in the water. Its speed increased; the rippings of its amorphous body-substance became quicker, more excited. It came on steadily.

While it came, the girl and her father worked desperately over Phil, massaging his body and pulling him further up the bank. It had all but reached the bank when Holmes gasped:

"I think I can walk now. Where—where did Quade go to?"

Guinness gestured over to the right, up a dim winding passage through the rocks.

"Then we must follow—fast!" Phil said, staggering to his feet. "He may get to the sphere first; he'll go up by himself even yet! I'm all right!"

Despite his words, he could not run, and could only command an awkward walk. Sue lifted one of his arms around her shoulder, and her father took the other, and without a backward glance they labored ahead. But Phil's strength quickly returned, and they raised the pace until they had broken once more into a stumbling run.

How far ahead James Quade was, they did not know, but obviously they could follow where he had gone. Once again the draft was strong on their backs. They felt sure they were on the last stretch, headed for the earth-borer. But, unless they could overtake Quade, he would be there first. They had no illusions about what that would mean....

Chapter 5: A Death More Hideous

Auade was there first.

When they burst out of a narrow crevice, not far from the funnel-shaped opening they had originally entered, they saw him standing beside the open door of the sphere as if waiting. The searchlight inside was still on, and in its shaft of light they could see that he was smiling thinly, once more his old, confident self. It would only take him a second to jump in, slam the door and lock it. He could afford a last gesture....

The three stopped short. They saw something he did not.

"So!" he observed in his familiar, mocking voice. He paused, seeing that they did not come on. He had plenty of time.

He said something else, but the two men and the girl did not hear what it was. As if by a magnet their eyes were held by what was hanging above him, clinging to the lip of the hole the sphere had made in the ceiling.

It was an amoeba, another of those single-celled, protoplasmic mounds of flesh. It had evidently come down through the hole; and now it was stretching, rubber-like, lower and lower, a living, reaching stalactite of whitish hunger.

Quade was all unconscious of it. His final words reached Phil's consciousness.

"... And this time, of course, I will keep the top disintegrators on. No other monster will then be able to weigh me down!"

He shrugged his shoulders and turned to the door. And that movement was the signal that brought his doom. Without a sound, the poised mass above dropped.

James Quade never knew what hit him. The heap of whitish jelly fell squarely. There was a brief moment of frantic lashing, of tortured struggles—then only tiny ripples running through the monster as it fed.

Sue Guinness turned her head. But the two men for

some reason could not take their eyes away....

It was the girl's voice that jerked them back to reality. "The other!" she gasped. "It's coming, behind!"

They had completely forgotten the mass in the tunnel. Turning, they saw that it was only fifteen feet away and approaching fast, and instinctively they ran out into the cavern, skirting the sphere widely. When they came to Quade's wrecked borer Phil, who had snatched a glance behind, dragged them down behind it. For he had seen their pursuer abandon the chase and go to share in the meal of its fellow.

"We'd best not get too far away," he whispered.

"When they leave the front of the borer, maybe we can make a dash for it."

For minutes that went like hours the young man watched, waiting for the creatures to be done, hoping that they would go away. Fortunately the sphere lay between, and he was not forced to see too much. Only one portion of one of the monsters was visible, lapping out from behind the machine....

At last his body tensed, and he gripped Sue and her father's arm in quick warning. The things were leaving the sphere. Or, rather, only one was. For Phil saw that they had agglutinated—merged into oneness—and now the monster that remained was the sum of the sizes of the original two. And more....

They all watched. And they all saw the amoeba stop, hesitate for a moment—and come straight for the wrecked borer behind which they were hidden.

"Damn!" Phil whispered hoarsely. "It's still hungry—and it's after us!"

David Guinness sighed wearily. "It's heavy and sluggish, now," he said, "so maybe if we run again.... Though I don't know how I can last any longer...."

Holmes did not answer. His eyes were narrowed; he was casting about desperately for a plan. He hardly felt Sue's light touch on his arm as she whispered:

"In case, Phil—in case.... This must be good-by...."

But the young man turned to her with gleaming eyes. "Good-by, nothing!" he cried. "We've still got a card to play!"

She stared at him, wondering if he had cracked from the strain of what he had passed through. But his next words assured her he had not. "Go back, Sue," he said levelly. "Go far back. We'll win through this yet."

She hesitated, then obeyed. She crept back from the wrecked borer, back into the dim rear, eyes on Phil and the sluggish mass that moved inexorably towards him. When she had gone fifteen or twenty yards she paused, and watched the two men anxiously.

Phil was talking swiftly to Professor Guinness. His voice was low and level, and though she could not hear the words she could catch the tone of assurance that ran through them. She saw her father nod his head, and he seemed to make the gesture with vigor. "I will," she heard him say; and he slapped Phil on the back, adding: "But for God's sake, be careful!"

And with these words the old man wormed inside

Quade's wrecked borer and was gone from the girl's sight.

She wanted desperately to run forward and learn what Phil intended to do, but she restrained herself and obeyed his order. She waited, and watched; and saw the young man stand up, look at the slowly advancing monster—and deliberately walk right into its path!

Sue could not move from her fright. In a daze she saw Phil advance cautiously towards the amoeba and pause when within five feet of it. The thing stopped; remained absolutely motionless. She saw him take another short step forward. This time a pseudopod emerged, and reached slowly out for him. Phil avoided it easily, but by so narrow a margin that the girl's heart stopped beating. Then she saw him step back; and, snail-like, the creature followed, pausing twice, as if wary and suspicious. Slowly Phil Holmes drew it after him.

To Sue, who did not know what was his plan, it seemed a deliberate invitation to death. She forgot

about her father, lying inside the mangled borer, waiting. She did not see that Phil was leading the monster directly in front of it....

It was a grotesque, silent pursuit. The creature appeared to be unalert; its movements were sloth-like; yet the girl knew that if Phil once ventured an inch too close, or slipped, or tried to dodge past it to the sphere, its torpidness would vanish and it would have him. His maneuvering had to be delicate, judged to a matter of inches. Tense with the suspense, the strain of the slow-paced seconds, she watched—and yet hardly dared to watch, fearful of the awful thing she might see.

It was a fantastic game of tag her lover was playing, with death the penalty for tardiness. The slow, enticing movements were repeated again and again, Phil advancing very close, and stepping back in the nick of time. Always he barely avoided the clutching white arms that were extended, and little by little he decoyed the thing onward....

Then came the end. As Holmes was almost in front of

the wrecked machine, Sue saw him glance quickly aside—and, as if waiting for that moment when he would be off guard, the monster whipped forward in a great, reaching surge.

Sue's ragged nerves cracked: she shrieked. They had him! She started forward, then halted abruptly. With a tremendous leap, Phil Holmes had wrenched free and flung himself backwards. She heard his yell:

"Now!"

There was a sputter from the bottom of the outstretched borer; then, like the crack of a whip, came a bellow of awful sound.

A thick cloud of dust reared up, and the ear-numbing thunder rolled through the cavern in great pulsing echoes. And then Sue Guinness understood what the young man had been about.

The disintegrators of James Quade's borer had sent a broad beam of annihilation into the monster. His own machine had destroyed his destroyer—and given his

intended victims their only chance to escape from the dread fate he had schemed for them.

Sue could see no trace of the creature in its pyre of slow-swirling dust. Caught squarely, its annihilation had been utter. And then, through the thunder that still echoed in her ear-drums, she heard a joyful voice.

"We got 'em!"

Through the dusty haze Phil appeared at her side. He flung his arms up exultantly, swept her off the ground, hugged her close.

"We got 'em!" he cried again. "We're free—free to go up!"

Professor David Guinness crawled from the borer. His face, for the first time since the descent, wore a broad smile. Phil ran over to him, slapped him on the back; and the older man said:

"You did it beautifully, Phil." He turned to Sue. "He had to decoy them right in front of the disintegrators.

It was—well, it was magnificent!"

"All credit to Sue: she was my inspiration!" Phil said, laughing. "But now," he added, "let's see if we can fix those dead rocket-tubes. I have a patient up above—and, anyway, I'm not over-fond of this place!"

The three had won through. They had blasted four miles down from the surface of the earth. The brain of an elderly scientist, the quick-witted courage of a young engineer, had achieved the seemingly impossible—and against obstacles that could not have been predicted. Death had attended that achievement, as death often does accompany great forward steps; James Quade had gone to a death more hideous than that he devised for the others. But, in spite of the justice of it, a moment of silence fell on the three survivors as they came to the spot where his fate at last had caught up to him.

But it was only a moment. It was relieved by Professor Guinness's picking up the chunk of radium ore his former partner had hewn from the cavern's wall. He held it up for all to see, and smiled.

"Here it is," he said simply.

Then he led the way into his earth-borer, and the little door closed quietly and firmly into place.

For a few minutes slight tappings came from within, as if a wrench or a screwdriver were being used. Then the tappings stopped, and all was silence.

A choke, a starting cough, came from beneath the sphere. A torrent of rushing sound burst out, and spears of orange flame spurted from the bottom and splashed up its sides, bathing it in fierce, brilliant light. It stirred. Then, slowly and smoothly, the great ball of metal raised up.

It hit the edge of the hole in the ceiling, and hung there, hesitating. Side-rockets flared, and the sphere angled over. Then it slid, roaring, through the hole.

Swiftly the spots of orange from its rocket-tube exhausts died to pin-points. There were now almost twenty of them. And soon these pin-points wavered, and vanished utterly.

Then there was only blackness in the hole that went up to the surface. Blackness in the hole, calm night on the desert above—and silence, as if the cavern were brooding on the puny figures and strange machines that had for the first time dared invade its solitude, in the realms four miles within the earth....

82 The Lake of Light by Jack Williamson

In the frozen wastes at the bottom of the world two explorers find a strange pool of white fire—and have a strange adventure.

Aproximate word count: 10,600

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

The roar of the motor rang loud in the frosty air above a desert of ice. The sky above us was a deep purple-blue; the red sun hung like a crimson eye low in the north. Three thousand feet below, through a hazy blue mist of wind-whipped, frozen vapor, was the rugged wilderness of black ice-peaks and blizzard-carved hummocks of snow—a grim, undulating waste, black and yellow, splotched with crystal white. The icy wind howled dismally through the struts. We were flying above the weird ice-mountains of the Enderby quadrant of Antarctica.

That was a perilous flight, across the blizzard-whipped bottom of the world. In all the years of polar exploration by air, since Byrd's memorable flights, this area had never been crossed. The intrepid Britisher, Major Meriden, with the daring American aviatrix whom the world had known as Mildred Cross before she married him, had flown into it nineteen years before—and like many others they had never returned.

Faintly, above the purring drone of the motor, I heard Ray Summers' shout. I drew my gaze from the desolate plateau of ice below and leaned forward. His lean, fur-hooded face was turned back toward me. A mittened hand was pointing, and thin lips moved in words that I did not hear above the roar of the engine and the scream of the wind.

I turned and looked out to the right, past the shimmering silver disk of the propeller. Under the blue haze of ice-crystals in the air, the ice lay away in a vast undulating plain of black and yellow, broken with splotches of prismatic whiteness, lying away in frozen desolation to the rim of the cold violet sky.

Rising against that sky I saw a curious thing.

It was a mountain of fire!

Beyond the desert of ice, a great conical peak pointed straight into the amethystine gloom of the polar heavens. It was brilliantly white, a finger of milky fire, a sharp cone of pure light. It shone with white radiance. It was brighter, far brighter, than is the sacred cone of Fujiyama in the vivid day of Japan.

For many minutes I stared in wonder at it. Far away it was; it looked very small. It was like a little heap of light poured from the hand of a fire-god. What it might be, I could not imagine. At first sight, I imagined it might be a volcano with streams of incandescent lava flowing down the side. I knew that this continent of mystery boasted Mt. Erebus and other active craters. But there was none of the smoke or lurid yellow flame which accompanies volcanic eruptions.

I was still watching it, and wondering, when the catastrophe took place—the catastrophe which hurled

us into a mad extravaganza of amazing adventure.

Our little two-place amphibian was flying smoothly, through air unusually good for this continent of storms. The twelve cylinders of the motor had been firing regularly since we took off from Byrd's old station at Little America fifteen hours before. We had crossed the pole in safety. It looked as if we might succeed in this attempt to penetrate the last white spot on the map. Then it Happened.

A sudden crack of snapping metal rang out sharp as a pistol report. A bright blade of metal flashed past the wing-struts, to fall in a flashing arc. The motor broke abruptly into a mad, deep-voiced roar. Terrific vibration shook the ship, until I feared that it would go to pieces.

Ray Summers, with his usual quick efficiency, cut the throttle. Quickly the motor slowed to idling speed; the vibration stopped. A last cough of the engine, and there was no sound save the shrill screaming of the wind in the gloomy twilight of this unknown land beyond the pole.

"What in the devil!" I exclaimed.

"The prop! See!" Ray pointed ahead.

I looked, and the dreadful truth flashed upon me. The steel propeller was gone, or half of it at least. One blade was broken off at a jagged line just above the hub.

"The propeller! What made it break? I've never heard —"

"Search me!" Ray grinned. "The important thing is that it did. It was all-metal, of course, tested and guaranteed. The guarantee isn't worth much here. A flaw in the forging, perhaps, that escaped detection. And this low temperature. Makes metal as brittle as glass. And the thing may have been crystallized by the vibration."

The plane was coming down in a shallow glide. I looked out at the grim expanse of black ice-crags and glistening snow below us, and it was far from a comforting prospect. But I had a huge amount of

confidence in Ray Summers. I have known him since the day he appeared, from his father's great Arizona ranch, to be a freshman in the School of Mines at El Paso, where I was then an instructor in geology. We have knocked about queer corners of the world together for a good many years. But he is still but a great boy, with the bluff, simple manners of the West.

"Do you think we can land?" I asked.

"Looks like we've got to," he said, grimly.

"And what after that?"

"How should I know? We have the sledge, tent, furs. Food, and fuel for the primus to last a week. There's the rifle, but it must be a thousand miles to anything to shoot. We can do our best."

"We should have had an extra prop."

"Of course. But it was so many pounds, when every pound counted. And who knew the thing would break?"

"We'll never get out on a week's provisions."

"Not a shot! Too bad to disappoint Captain Harper."
Ray grinned wanly. "He ought to have the *Albatross* around there by this time, waiting for us." The *Albatross* was the ship which had left us at Little America a few months before, to steam around and pick us up at our destination beyond Enderby Land. "We're in the same boat with Major Meriden and his wife—and all those others. Lost without a trace."

"You've read Scott's diary—that he wrote after he visited the pole in 1912—the one they found with the bodies?"

"Yes. Not altogether cheerful. But we won't be trying to get out. No use of that." He looked at me suddenly, grinning again. "Say, Jim, why not try for that shining mountain we saw? It looks queer enough to be interesting. We ought to make it in a week."

"I'm with you," I said.

I did not speak again, for the jagged ice-peaks were

coming rather near. I held my breath as the little plane veered around a slender black spire and dropped toward a tiny scrap of smooth snow among the ice-hummocks. I might have spared my anxiety. Under Ray's consumately skilful piloting, the skids struck the snow with hardly a shock. We glided swiftly over the ice and came to rest just short of a yawning crevasse.

"Suppose," said Ray, "that we spend the first night in the plane. We are tired already. We can keep warm here, and sleep. We've plenty of ice to melt for water. Then we're off for the shining mountain."

I agreed: Ray Summers is usually right. We got out the sledge, packed it, took our bearings, and made all preparations for a start to the luminous mountain, which was about a hundred miles away. The thermometer stood at twenty below, but we were comfortable enough in our furs as we ate a scanty supper and went to sleep in the cabin of the plane.

We started promptly the next morning, after draining the last of the hot chocolate from our vacuum bottles,

which we left behind. We had a light but powerful sporting rifle, with telescopic sights, and several hundred rounds of ammunition. Ray put them in the pack, though I insisted that we would never need them, unless a quick way out of our predicament.

"No, Jim," he said. "We take 'em along. We don't know what we're going to find at the shining mountain."

The air was bitterly cold as we set out: it was twenty-five below and a sharp wind was blowing. Only our toiling at the sledge kept us warm. We covered eighteen miles that day, and made a good camp in the lee of a bare stone ridge.

That night there was a slight fall of snow. When we went on it was nearly thirty-five degrees below zero. The layer of fresh snow concealed irregularities in the ice, making our pulling very hard. After an exhausting day we had made hardly fifteen miles.

On the following day the sky was covered with gray clouds, and a bitterly cold wind blew. We should have remained in the tent, but the shortage of food made it

imperative that we keep moving. We felt immensely better after a reckless, generous fill of hot pemmican stew; but the next morning my feet were so painful from frost-bite that I could hardly get on my fur boots.

Walking was very painful to me that day, but we made a good distance, having come to smoother ice. Ray was very kind in caring for me. I became discouraged about going on at all: it was very painful, and I knew there was no hope of getting out. I tried to get some of our morphine tablets, but Ray had them, and refused to be convinced that he ought to go on without me.

On the next march we came in sight of the luminous mountain, which cheered me considerably. It was a curious thing, indeed. A straight-sided cone of light it was, rather steeper than the average volcano. Its point was sharp, its sides smooth as if cut with a mammoth plane. And it shone with a pure white light, with a steady and unchanging milky radiance. It rose out of the black and dull yellow of the ice wilderness like a white finger of hope.

The next morning it was a little warmer. Ray had been caring for my feet very attentively, but it took me nearly two hours to get on my footgear. Again I tried to get him to leave me, but he refused.

We arrived at the base of the shining mountain in three more marches. On the last night the fuel for the primus was all gone, having been used up during the very cold weather, and we were unable to melt water to drink. We munched the last of our pemmican dry.

A few minutes after we had started on the last morning, Ray stopped suddenly.

"Look at that!" he cried.

I saw what he had seen—the wreck of an airplane, the wings crumpled up and blackened with fire. We limped up to it.

"A Harley biplane!" Ray exclaimed. "That is Major Meriden's ship! And look at that wing! It looks like it's been in an electric furnace!"

I examined the metal wing; saw that it had been blackened with heat. The metal was fused and twisted.

"I've seen a good many wrecks, Jim. I've seen planes that burned as they fell. But nothing like that. The fuselage and engines were not even afire. Jim, something struck out from that shining mountain and brought them down!"

"Are they—" I began.

Ray was poking about in the snow in the cockpits.

"No. Not here. Probably would have been better for them if they had been killed in the plane. Quick and merciful."

He examined the engines and propellers.

"No. Seems to be nothing wrong. Something struck them down!"

Soon we went on.

The shining mountain rose before us like a great cone of fire. It must have been three thousand feet high, and about that in diameter at the bottom. Its walls were as smooth and straight as though turned from milky rock crystal in a gigantic lathe. It shone with a steady, brilliantly white radiance.

"That's no natural hill!" Ray grunted beside me as we limped on.

We were less than a mile from the foot of the cone of fire. Soon we observed another remarkable thing about it. It seemed that a straight band of silvery metal rose from the snow about its foot.

"Has it a wall around it?" I exclaimed.

"Evidently," said Ray. "Looks as if it's built on a round metal platform. But by whom? When? Why?"

We approached the curious wall. It was of a white metal, apparently aluminum, or a silvery alloy of that metal. In places it was twenty-five feet high, but more usually the snow and ice was banked high against it.

The smooth white wall of the gleaming mountain stood several hundred yards back from the wall.

"Let's have a look over it." Ray suggested. "We can get up on that hummock, against it. You know, this place must have been built by men!"

We clambered up over the ice, as he suggested, until our heads came above the top of the wall.

"A lake of fire!" cried Ray.

Indeed, a lake of liquid fire lay before us. The white aluminum wall was hardly a foot thick. It formed a great circular tank, nearly a mile across, with the cone of white fire rising in the center. And the tank was filled, to within a foot of the top, with shimmeringly brilliant white fluid, bright and luminous as the cone—liquid light!

Ray dipped a hand into it. The hand came up with fingers of fire, radiant, gleaming, with shining drops falling from them. With a spasmodic effort, he flung off the luminous drops, rubbed his hand on his

garments, and got it back into its fur mitten.

"Gee, it's cold!" he muttered. "Freeze the horns off a brass billy-goat!"

"Cold light!" I exclaimed. "What wouldn't a bottle of that stuff be worth to a chemist back in the States!"

"That cone must be a factory to make the stuff." Ray suggested, hugging his hand. "They might pump the liquid up to the top, and then let it trickle down over the sides: that would explain why the cone is so bright. The stuff might absorb sunlight, like barium sulphide. And there could be chemical action with the air, under the actinic rays."

"Well, if somebody's making cold light, where does he use it?"

"I'd like to find out, and strike him for a hot meal," Ray said, grinning. "It's too cold to live on top of the ground around here. They must run it down in a cave."

"Then let's find the hole."

"You know it's possible we won't be welcome. This mountain of light may be connected with the vanishing of all the aviators. We'd better take along the rifle."

We set off around just outside the white metal wall. The snow and ice was irregularly banked against it, but the wall itself was smooth and unbroken. We had limped along for some two miles, or more than halfway around the amazing lake of light. I had begun to doubt that we would find anything.

Then we came to a square metal tower, ten feet on a side, that rose just outside the silvery wall, to a level with its top. The ice was low here; the tower rose twenty feet above its unequal surface. We found metal flanges riveted to its side, like the steps of a ladder. They were most inconveniently placed, nearly four feet apart; but we were able to climb them, and to look down the shaft.

It was a straight-sided pit, evidently some hundreds of

feet deep. We could see a tiny square of light at the bottom, very far away. The flanges ran down the side forming the rungs of a ladder that gave access to whatever lay at the bottom.

Without hesitation, Ray climbed over the side and started down. I followed him, feeling a great relief in getting out of the freezing wind. Ray had the rifle and ammunition strapped to his back, along with a few other articles; and I had a small pack. We had abandoned the sledge, with the useless stove and the most of our instruments. Our food was all gone.

The metal flanges were fully four feet apart, and it was not easy to scramble down from one to another; certainly not easy for one who was cold, hungry, thirsty, worn out with a week of exhausting marches, and suffering the torture of frozen feet.

"You know, this thing was not built by men," Ray observed.

"Not built by men? What do you mean?"

"Men would have put the steps closer together. Jim, I'm afraid we are up against something—well—that we aren't used to."

"If men didn't build this, what did?" I was astounded.

"Search me! This continent has been cut off from the rest of the world for geologic ages. Such life as has been found here is not common to the rest of the earth. It is not impossible that some form of life, isolated here, has developed intelligence and acquired the power to erect that cone of light—and to burn the wing off a metal airplane."

My thoughts whirled madly as we clambered down the shaft.

It must have taken us an hour to reach the bottom. I did not count the steps, but it must have been at least a thousand feet. The air grew rapidly warmer as we descended. We both took off most of our heavy fur garments, and left them hanging on the rungs.

I was rather nervous. I felt the nearness of an

intelligent, hostile power. I had a great fear that the owners of those steps would use them to find us, and then crush us ruthlessly as they had brought down Meriden's plane.

The little square of white light below grew larger. Finally I saw Ray swing off and stand on his feet in a flood of white radiance below me. The air was warm, moist, laden with a subtle unfamiliar fragrance that suggested growing things. Then I stood beside Ray.

We stood on the bare stone floor of a huge cavern. It must have been of volcanic origin. The walls glistened with the sparkling smoothness of volcanic glass. It was a huge space. The black roof was a hundred feet high, or more; the cave was some hundreds of feet wide. And it sloped away from us into dim distance as though leading into huger cavities below.

The light that shone upon us came from an amazing thing—a fall of liquid fire. From the roof plunged a sheer torrent of white brilliantly luminous fluid, falling a hundred feet into a shimmering pool of moon-flame. Shining opalescent mists swirled about

it, and the ceaseless roar of it filled the cave with sound. It seemed that a stream of the phosphorescent stuff ran off down the cave from the pool, to light the lower caverns.

"Very clever!" said Ray. "They make the stuff up there at the cone and run it in here to see by."

"This warm air feels mighty good," I remarked, pulling off another garment.

Ray sniffed the air. "A curious odor. Smells like something growing. Where anything is growing there ought to be something to eat. Let's see what we can find."

Only black obsidian covered the floor about us. Cautiously we skirted the overflowing pool of white fire, and followed down the stream of it that flowed toward the inner cavern. We had gone but a few hundred yards when suddenly Ray stopped me with a hand on my arm.

"Lie flat!" he hissed. "Quick!"

He dived behind a huge mass of fire-born granite. I flung myself down beside him.

"Something is coming up the trail by the shining river. And it isn't a man! It's between us and the light; we should be able to see it."

Soon I heard a curious scraping sound, and a little tinkle of metal. I caught a whiff of a powerful odor—a strange, fishy odor—so strong that it almost knocked me down.

The thing that made the scraping and the tinkle and the smell came into view. The sight of it sickened me with horror.

It was far larger than a man; its body was heavy as a horse's, but nearer the ground. In form it suggested a huge crab, though it was not very much like any crustacean I had ever seen. It was mostly red in color, and covered with a huge scarlet shell. It had five pairs of limbs. The two forward pairs had pinchers, seemingly used as hands; it scraped along on the other three pairs. Yard-long antennae, slender and

luminously green, wavered above a grotesque head. The many facets of compound eyes stood on the end of foot-long stalks.

The amazing crab-thing wore a metal harness. Bands of silvery aluminum were fastened about its shell, with little cases of white metal dangling to them. In one of its uplifted claws it carried what seemed to be an aluminum bar, two feet long and an inch thick.

It scraped lumberingly past, between us and the racing stream of white fire. It passed less than a dozen feet from us. The curious fishy smell of it was overpowering, disgusting.

Sweat of horror chilled my limbs. The monster emanated power, sinister, malevolent power, power intelligent, alien and hostile to man.



I trembled with the fear that it would see us, but it scrambled grotesquely on. When it was twenty yards past, Ray picked up a block of black lava that lay beneath his hand and hurled it silently and swiftly. It crashed splinteringly on the rocks far beyond the creature, on the other side of the stream of light.

In fascination I watched the monster as it paused as if astonished. The glittering compound eyes twisted about on their stalks, and the long shining green tentacles wavered questioningly. Then the knobbed

limbs snapped the white metal tube to a level position. A metallic click came from it.

And a ray of red light, vivid and intense, burst from the tube. It flashed across the river of fire. With a dull, thudding burst it struck the rocks where the stone had fallen. It must have been a ray of concentrated heat. Rocks beneath it flashed into sudden incandescence, splintered and cracked, flowed in molten streams.

In a moment the intensely brilliant ruby ray flashed off. The rocks in the circle where it had struck faded to a dull red and then to blackness, still cracking and crumbling.

To my intense relief, the monstrous crab lumbered on.

"That," Ray whispered, "is what got Major Meriden's airplane wing."

When we could hear its scraping progress no longer, we climbed up from behind our boulder and continued cautiously down the cavern, beside the

rushing luminous river. In half a mile we came to a bend. Rounding it, we gazed upon a remarkable sight.

We looked into a huge cavity in the heart of the earth. A vast underground plain lay before us, with the black lava of the roof arching above it. It must have been miles across, though we had no way to measure it, and it stretched down into dim hazy distance. Its level was hundreds of feet below us.

At our feet the glistening river of fire plunged down again in a magnificent flaming fall. Below, its luminous liquid was spread out in rivers and lakes and canals, over all the vast plain. The channels ran through an amazing jungle. It was a forest of fungus, of mushroom things with great fleshy stalks and spreading circular tops. But they were not the sickly white and yellow of ordinary mushrooms, but were of brilliant colors, bright green, flaming scarlet, gold and purple-blue. Huge brilliant yellow stalks, fringed with crimson and black, lifted mauve tops thirty feet or more. It was a veritable forest of flame-bright fungus.

In the center of this weirdly forested subterranean plain was a great lake, filled, not with the flaming liquid, but with dark crystal water. And on the bottom of that lake, clearly visible from the elevation upon which we stood, was a city!

A city below the water! The buildings were upright cylinders in groups of two or three, of dozens, even of hundreds. For miles, the bottom of the great lake was covered with them. They were all of crystal, azure-blue, brilliant as cylinders turned from immense sapphires. They were vividly visible beneath the transparent water. Not one of them broke the surface.

Through the clear black water we saw moving hundreds, thousands of the giant crabs. They crawled over the hard, pebbled bottom of the lake, or swam between the crystal cylinders of the city. They were huge as the one we had seen, with red shells, great ominous looking stalked eyes, luminous green tentacular antennae and knobbed claws on forelimbs.

"Looks as if we've run on something to write home about," Ray muttered in amazement.

"A whole city of them! A whole world! No wonder they could build that cone-mountain for a lighting plant!"

"When they got to knocking down airplanes with that heat-ray," he speculated, "they were probably surprised to find that other animals had developed intelligence."

"Do you suppose those mushroom things are good to eat?"

"We can try and see—if the crabs don't get us first with a heat-ray. I'm hungry enough to try anything!"

Again we cautiously advanced. The river of light fell over a sheer precipice, but we found a metal ladder spiked to the rock, with rungs as inconveniently far apart as those in the shaft. It was five hundred feet, I suppose, to the bottom; it took us many minutes to descend.

At last we stepped off in a little rocky clearing. The forest of brilliant mushrooms rose about us, great

fleshy stalks of gold and graceful fringes of black and scarlet about them, with flattened heads of purple.

We started eagerly across toward the fungoid forest. I had visions of tearing off great pieces of soft, golden flesh and filling my aching stomach with it.

We were stopped by a sharp, poignantly eager human cry.

A human being, a girl, darted from among the mushroom stalks and ran across to us. Sobbing out great incoherent cries, she dropped at Ray's feet, wrapped her arms about his knees and clung to him, while her slender body was wracked with sobbing cries.

My first impression was that she was very beautiful—and that impression I was never called upon to revise. About her lithe young body she had the merest scrap of some curious green fabric—ample in the warm air of the great cavern. Luxuriant brown hair fell loose about her white shoulders. She was not quite twenty years old, I supposed; her body was superbly formed,

with the graceful curves and the free, smooth movements of a wild thing.

Ray stood motionless for a moment, thunder-struck as I was, while the sobbing girl clung to his knees. Then the astonishment on his face gave place to pity.

"Poor kid!" he murmured.

He bent, took her tenderly by the shoulder, helped her to her feet.

Her beauty burst upon us like a great light. Smoothly white, her skin was, perfect. Wide blue eyes, now appealing, even piteous, looked from beneath a wealth of golden brown hair. White teeth, straight and even, flashed behind the natural crimson of her lips.

She stood staring at Ray, in a sort of enchantment of wonder. An eager light of incredible joy flamed in her amazing eyes; red lips were parted in an unconscious smile of joy. She looked like the troubled princess in the fairy tale, when the prince of her dreams appeared in the flesh.

"God, but you're beautiful!" Ray's words slipped out as if he were hardly conscious of them. He flushed quickly, stepped back a little.

The girl's lips opened. She voiced a curious cry. It was deep toned, pealing with a wonderful timbre. A happy burst of sound, like a baby makes. But strong, ringing, musically golden. And pathetically eager, pitifully glad, so that it brought tears to my eyes, cynical old man that I am.

I saw Ray wipe his eyes.

"Can you talk?" Ray put the question in a clear, deliberate voice, with great kindness ringing in it.

"Talk?" The chiming, golden voice was slow, uncertain. "Talk? Yes. I talked—with mother. But for long—I have had no need to talk."

"Where is your mother?" Ray's voice was gentle.

"She is gone. She was here when I was little." The clear, silvery voice was more certain now. "Once,

when I was almost as big as she—she was still. She was cold. She did not move when I called her. The Things took her away. She was dead. She told me that sometime she would be dead."

Bright tears came in the wide blue eyes, trickled down over the perfect face. A pathetic catch was in the deliberate, halting voice. I turned away, and Ray put a handkerchief to his face.

"What is your name? Who are you?" Ray spoke kindly.

"I am Mildred. Mildred Meriden."

"Meriden!" Ray turned to me. "I bet this is a daughter of the major and his wife!"

"Father was the major," the girl said slowly. "He and mother came in a machine that flew, from a far land. The Things burned the machine with the red fire. They came here and the Things kept them. They made mother sing over the water. They killed father. I never saw him."

"I know," Ray, said gently. "We came from the same land. We saw your father's machine above."

"You came from outside! And you are going back? Oh, take me with you! Take me!" Piteous pleading was in her voice. "It is so—lonely since the Things took Mother away. Mother told me that sometime men would come, and take me away to see the people and the outside that she told me of. Oh, please take me!"

"Don't worry! You go along whenever we leave—if we can get out."

"Oh, I am so glad! You are very good!"

Impulsively, she threw her arms around Ray's neck. Gently, he disengaged himself, flushing a little. I noticed, however, that he did not seem particularly displeased.

"But can we get out?"

"Mother and I tried. We could never get out. The Things watch. They make me come to the water to

sing, when the great bell rings."

"Are these things goods to eat?" I motioned to the brilliant fungal forest. I had begun to fear that Ray would never get to this very important topic.

Blue eyes regarded me. "Eat? Oh, you are hungry! Come! I have food."

Like a child, she grasped Ray's hand, pulled him toward the mushroom jungle. I followed, and we slipped in between the brilliantly golden, fleshy stalks. They rose to the tangle of bright feathery fringes above, huge and substantial as the trunks of trees.

In a few minutes we came to a wide, shallow canal, metal-walled, through which a slow current of the opalescent, luminous liquid was flowing. We crossed this on a narrow metal foot-bridge, and went on through the brilliant forest.

Suddenly we emerged into a little clearing, with the black waters of the great lake visible beyond it,

across a quarter-mile of rocky beach. In the middle of the open space, rose three straight cylinders of azure crystal, side by side. Each must have been twenty feet in diameter, and forty high. They shone with a clear blue light, like the cylindrical buildings we had seen in the strange city of the crab-creatures below the great lake.

Mildred Meriden, the strangely beautiful girl who had known no other world than this amazing cavern empire where giant crabs reigned, beckoned us with unconscious queenly grace to enter the arched door in the blue sapphire wall of her remarkable abode of clustered cylinders.

The crystal of the walls seemed luminous, the lofty cylinders were filled with a liquid, azure radiance. The high round room we entered was strangely furnished. There was a silken couch, a bathing pool of blue crystal filled with sparkling water, a curious chest of drawers made of bright aluminum with a mirror of polished crystal, its top bearing odd combs and other articles. The furnishings must have been done by the giant crabs, under human direction.

Mildred led us quickly across the room, through an arched opening into another. A round aluminum table stood in the center of the room, with two curious metal chairs beside it. Odd metal cabinets stood about the shining blue walls. The girl made us sit down, and put dishes before us.

She gave us each a bowl of thick, sweetish soup, darkly red; placed before us a dish piled high with little circular cakes, crisp and brown, which had a tantalizing fragrance; poured for each of us a transparent crystal goblet full of clear amber drink.

We fell to with enthusiasm and abandon.

"The Things made this place for father," the girl told us, as she watched us eat, attentively replenishing the red soup in the great blue crystal bowl, or the little cakes, or the fragrant amber drink. "They would give him anything he wanted. But he tried to go away with mother, and they killed him."

"We must get out of here," Ray declared when at last we had done. "We must get together a lot of food, and

enough clothing for all of us. We ought to be able to make it to the edge of the ice-pack. We've got to give these crab-things the slip; we ought to get off before they know we're here—unless they already do."

Mildred was eagerly attentive: she was so unused to human speech that it took the best of her efforts to understand us, though it seems that her mother had given her quite a wide education. She promised that there would be no difficulty about the food.

"Mother taught me how to fix food," she said. "She always said that sometime men would come, with weapons of fire and great noise that would tear and kill the Things. I have food ready, in bags—more than we can carry. I have, too, the furs that mother and father wore."

She ran into another room and returned with a great pile of fur garments, which we examined and found to be in good condition.

"Now is the time," Ray said. "I'd like to know more about the big crabs, but there'll be a chance for that,

later. Mildred is the important thing, now. We must get her out. Then we can tell the world about this place and come back with a bigger expedition."

"You think we can reach the coast?"

"I think so. It might be hard on Mildred. But we will have food; we can probably find fuel for the stove in Meriden's plane, if the tanks were well sealed. And Captain Harper should have a relief party landed and sent to meet us. We should have only three or four hundred miles to go alone."

"Three or four hundred miles, over country like we've been crossing in the last week, with a girl! Ray, we'd never make it!"

"It's the only chance."

I said nothing more. I knew that I could stand no such march on my frozen feet, but I resolved to say nothing about it. I would help them as far as I could, and then walk out of camp some night. Men have done just that.

Mildred brought out sacks of the little cakes, and of a red powder that seemed to be the dried and ground flesh of a crimson mushroom. We made a pack for each of us, as heavy as we could carry.

Just before we were ready to start Ray took off my footgear and treated my feet from his medicine kit. I had feared gangrene, but he assured me that there was no danger if they were well cared for. Walking was still exquisitely painful to me as we slipped out through the arched door and into the fungoid forest beyond the three blue cylinders.

As rapidly and silently as possible we hastened through the brilliant fungous forest, across the river of opalescent liquid, to the foot of the fall of fire. A weird and splendid sight was that sheer arc of shimmering white flame, roaring into a pool of opal light, and surrounded with a mist of moon-flame.

We reached the foot of the metal ladder spiked to the rocks beside the fall and started up immediately. The going was not easy. The packs of food, heavy enough when we were on level ground, were difficult indeed

to lift when one was scrambling up over rungs four feet apart.

Ray climbed ahead, with a piece of rope fastened from his waist to Mildred's, so that he could help her if she slipped. I was below the girl. We were halfway up the rock when suddenly a glare of red light shone upon me, casting my shadow sharply on the cliff. I looked up and saw the broad, intensely red beam of a heat-ray like that we had seen the giant crab use.

The ray came, evidently, from the shore of the great lake with its submerged city of blue cylinders. It fell upon the face of the cliff just above us. Quickly the ladder was heated to cherry red. The face of the rock grew incandescent, cracked. Hot sparks rained down upon us.

Slowly the ray moved down, toward us.

"Guess we'd better call it off," said Ray. "They have the advantage right now. Better get to climbing down, Jim. This ladder is going to be burning my hands pretty soon."

I climbed down. Mildred and Ray scrambled down behind me.

The ray followed us, keeping the metal at a cherry red just above Ray's hands.

I looked down and saw a dozen of the giant crabs lumbering up out of the fungoid jungle from the direction of the great lake. Hideous things they were, with staring, stalked eyes, shining green antennae, polished red shells, claw-armed limbs. Like the one that had passed us in the upper cavern, they wore glistening white metal accoutrements.

We clambered down, with the red ray following.

I dropped to the ground among them, wet with the sweat of horror. I reeled in nausea from the intolerable odor of the crab-things; it was indescribable, overpowering.

Curious rasping stridulations came from them, sounds which seemed to serve as means of communication, and which Mildred evidently understood.

"They say that you will not be harmed, but that you must not go out," she called down.

I was seized by the pincher-like claws, held writhing in an unbreakable grasp, while the glittering eyes twisted about, looked at me, and the shining green tentacles wavered questioningly over me. My stomach revolted at the horrible odor.

The crabs tore off my pack, even my clothing. Ray was similarly treated as soon as he reached the ground. Though they took Mildred's pack, they treated her with a curious respect.

In a few minutes they released us. They had taken the packs, the rifle and ammunition, our medicine kit and the few instruments we had brought with us down the shaft, even our clothing. They turned us loose stark naked. Ray's face and neck went beet-red when he saw Mildred standing by him.

The rasping sound came from one of them again.

"It says you may stay with me," Mildred said. "They

will not harm you unless you try again to get away. If you do, you die—as father did. They will keep what they took from you."

Several of the creatures went scraping off, carrying the articles they had taken from us either in their claws or in the metal cases they wore. Several waited, staring at us with the stalked compound eyes, and waving the green antennae as if they were organs of some special sense.

Two of the creatures waited at the foot of the metal ladder, holding the long slender white tubes of the heat-ray in their claws.

"They say we can go now," Mildred said.

She led the way toward the edge of the brilliant jungle. She seemed to be without false modesty, for I saw her glancing with evident admiration at Ray's lithe and powerful white-skinned figure. We followed her into the giant mushrooms, glad to escape the overpowering stench of the crabs.

In a few minutes we arrived again at the strange building of the three blue cylinders. Mildred, noticing our discomfort, produced for each of us a piece of white silken fabric with which we draped ourselves.

She had noticed my difficulty in walking on bare feet. She had me bathe them, then dressed them with a soothing yellow oil, and bandaged them skilfully.

"Anyhow," she said later, "it is good to have both of you here with me. I am sorry indeed for you that you may never see your country again. But it is good fortune for me. I was so lonely."

"These damned crabs don't know me!" Ray Summers muttered. "They think I'll play around like a pet kitten, for the rest of my life! They'll get their eyes opened. We'll spend the winter on Palm Beach yet!"

"It seems to me that we're rather outnumbered." I said. "And it's rather more pleasant in here than outside."

"I'm going to get that rifle," Ray declared, "and give

these big crabs a little respect for humanity!"

"Let's rest up a while first, anyhow," I urged.

Presently Mildred noticed how tired we were. She went into the third of the connected cylinders of blue crystal, was busy a few minutes and called us to the couches she had prepared there.

"You may sleep," she told us. "The Things never come here. And they said they would not harm you, if you did not try to go out."

We lay down on the silken beds. In a few minutes I was sleep. I awoke to feel a curious unease, a sense of impending catastrophe. Ray was bending over me, his face drawn with anxiety.

"Something's happened!" he whispered. "She's gone!"

I sat up, staring into the liquid blue vastness of the tall cylinder above us.

"Listen! What's that?"

A deep bell-note sounded out, brazen, clanging. Sonorous, throbbing, mighty, it rang through the cylindered rooms. Slowly it died; faded to silence with a last ringing pulse. Tense minutes of silence passed. Again it boomed out, throbbed, and died. After more long minutes there was yet a third.

"Outside, somewhere!"

Ray started; ran to the arched door. We looked out upon the dense forest of gold and crimson mushrooms that grew below the black cavern roof. Before us, across a few hundred yards of bare rocky beach, was the edge of the crystal lake with the city of blue cylinders upon its floor.

"God! What's that?" Ray gripped my arm crushingly.

A thin wailing scream came across the beach from the black lake. A piteous sound it was, plaintive, pleading. Higher and higher it rose, until it was a piercing silver note. Clear and sweet it was, but inexpressibly lonely, sorrowful, mournful. It sank slowly, died away. Again it rose and fell, and again.

"It's Mildred!" I gasped. "Didn't she say something about singing to the crabs?"

"Yes! I think she did. Well, if that's singing, it's wonderful! Had me feeling like I'd never see another human. But listen—"

Liquid, trilling notes were rising, pealing out in a queer, swift rhythm. It was happy, joyous, carefree. The rippling golden tones made me think of the caroling of birds on a spring morning. Swiftly it rose and fell, pure and clear as the tinkle of a mountain brook.

Mildred sang not words but notes of pure music.

The gay song died.

And the strong clear voice rose again with the force and challenge of bugle notes, with a swift marching time beating through it. It throbbed to a rhythm strange to me. It set my feet tingling to move; it set my heart to pulsing faster. It was a challenge to action, to battle.

Unconsciously obeying the suggestion of the song, Ray whispered, "Let's get over and see what's going on."

We leaped through the door and ran across four hundred yards of rocky beach to the edge of the lake. We stepped on a granite bluff a few yards above the water, to gaze upon as strange a sight as men ever saw.

The black water lay before us, a transparent crystal sheet. On its rocky bottom we could see the innumerable clusters of upright azure cylinders that were the city of the crabs. The blue cylinders seemed to bend and waver in the water.

A hundred yards away from us, over the dark water, was Mildred. She stood on a slender azure cylinder that came just to the surface. Tall, slender, superbly graceful, with only the scant bodice of green silken stuff about her, she looked like the statue of a goddess in white marble. Her head was thrown up, golden-brown hair fell behind her shoulders, and the pure notes of her song rang over the water.

Beyond her, all about her, were thousands upon thousands of the giant crabs, swimming at the surface of the water. Their green antenna rose above the water, a curious forest of luminous tentacles, flexing, wavering. Green coils moved and swung in time to the strange rhythm of her song.

The last note died. Her white arms fell in a gesture of finality. The thousands of twisting green antennae vanished below the water, and the giant red crabs swam swiftly back to the tall blue cylinders of their submerged city.

The white goddess turned and saw us.

Her voice rang out in a golden shout of welcome. With a clean dive she slipped into the water and came swimming swiftly toward us. Her slim white body glided through the crystal water as smoothly as a fish. Reaching the shore she sprang to her feet and ran to meet Ray.

"The Things come together when the giant bell rings, to listen to my song," she said. "They like my singing,

as they liked mother's. But for that, they would not let us live. That is the reason they would not let us go."

"I like your singing, too," Ray informed her. "Though at first you made me cry. It was so lonely."

"The song was lonely because I have been lonely. Did you hear the glad song I sang because you have come?"

"Sure! Great stuff! Made me feel like a kid at Christmas!"

"Come," she said. "We will eat."

Like a child, she took Ray's hand again, smiling naively up at him as she led the way toward the three sapphire cylinders.

Back in the blue-vaulted dining room, Ray made Mildred sit with me at the little metal table while he served the little brown cakes and the dark-red soup and the fragrant amber drink. Mildred got up and brought a great metal bowl filled with tiny purple

fruits that had a delicious, piquant tang.

Ray was deeply thoughtful as he ate. Suddenly he sat back and cried out:

"I've got it!"

"Got what?" I demanded.

"I want that rifle! Mildred can find out where it is. Then, when she sings, the crabs will all come. I'll get the gun, while she is singing, and hide it. Then when it comes time to get out, she will sing while you and I are getting our packs up the cliff. I can cover them with the rifle while she gets up to us."

"Looks good enough," I agreed, "provided they all come to hear the singing."

He explained the plan at greater length to the girl. She assured him that the crabs all come when the bell-notes sound. She thought that she could make them return her furs, and find out where they had put the gun.

My feet were much better than they had been, and Mildred dressed them again with the yellow oil. Ray examined them, said that I should be able to walk as well as ever in a few days.

Considerable time went by. Since the crabs had taken our watches, we had no very accurate way of counting days; but I think we slept about a dozen times. Ray and Mildred spent a good deal of time together, and seemed not altogether to hate each other. By the end of the time my feet were quite well; I did not even lose a toe.

We went over our plans for escape in great detail. The crabs had confiscated our clothing. Mildred managed to secure the return of her furs, and, incidentally, while she was about it, learned where the rifle was.

Fortunately, perhaps realizing that it would be ruined by water, the crabs had not taken it to their submerged city. Being amphibious, they lived above water as easily as below, and much of their industrial equipment was above the surface. The great pumps which lifted the white phosphorescent liquid from the

canals back to the cone above the ground were located beyond the great lake. I did not see the place, but Ray tells me that they had great engines and a wealth of strange and complex machinery there. It was at these pumps that they had left our rifle and instruments, as Mildred found when she was recovering her furs.

They had taken our food, and we prepared as much more as we could carry, arranged sacks for it, and made quilted garments for ourselves.

Then the three brazen notes clanged out, and Mildred ran across the beach and swam out to the blue cylinder to sing. Ray slipped hurriedly away, while the green forest of antennae was still growing up from the water about the girl.

I waited above the beach, enchanted by the haunting, wordless melody of the gongs. It seemed that only a few minutes had passed, though it may have been an hour or more, when Ray was by my side again. He flourished the rifle.

"I've got it! In good shape, too. Hasn't even been fired, though it looks like they have opened a box of cartridges, and cut open one or two. Maybe they didn't understand the outfit—or it may be such a primitive weapon that they aren't interested in it."

We hurried up to the building of blue cylinders and carefully hid the gun and ammunition, as well as a sun compass, a pair of prism binoculars, and a few other articles Ray had recovered.

In a few minutes Mildred, having seen Ray's return, finished her song and ran up to join us. We arranged our packs, and waited the next call of the throbbing brazen gong to make the attempt for freedom.

We slept twice again before the clang of the great gong. Ray and Mildred were always together; I could not see that they were at all impatient.

The bell note came, the awful brazen vibration of it ringing on the black cavern roof. It came when we were eating, in the liquid turquoise radiance of the lofty cylinder. We sprang out. Ray gave his last

directions to Mildred.

"Give us time to get to the top of the cliff by the shining fall. Then swim ashore and run. They may not notice. And if they do, we give 'em a taste of lead!"

I was not very much surprised when he took the girl in his arms and put a burning kiss on her red lips. She gasped, but her struggles subsided very quickly; she clung to him as he freed her.

She paused a moment in the door, before she ran down across the beach. A radiant light of joy was burning in her great blue eyes, even though tears were glistening there.

Ray and I waited, to give time for the giant crabs that guarded the ladder to get away. In about ten more minutes the second brazen gong sounded, and presently the third. We gathered up the heavy packs of food. Ray took the rifle and I the binoculars, and we slipped out into the brilliant mushroom forest.

I stepped confidently out of the jungle into the

clearing below the splendid opalescent fall of fire—and threw myself backward in trembling panic. A flaming crimson ray cut hissing into the towering mushrooms above my head.

Mildred's confidence that the crabs would all gather at the ringing of the gong had been mistaken. The two guards had been waiting at the foot of the ladder, their flaming heat-rays ready for use.

As I dived back into the jungle, I heard two quick reports of the rifle. I scrambled awkwardly to my feet, beneath the heavy pack. Ray stood alert beside me, the smoking rifle in his hand. The giant crabs had collapsed by the foot of the ladder, in grotesque and hideous metal-bound heaps of red shell and twisted limb. Blood was oozing from a ragged hole in the head of each.

"Glad they were here," Ray muttered. "I wanted to try the gun out on 'em. They're soft enough beneath the shell; the bullet tears 'em up inside. Let's get a move on!"

He sprang past the revolting carcasses. I followed, holding my nose against their nauseating, charnel-house odor. We scrambled up the metal ladder.

As we climbed, I could hear the haunting melody of Mildred's wordless song coming faint across the distance. Once I glanced back for a moment, and glimpsed her tiny white figure above the black water, with the thousands of green antennae rising in a luminous forest about her.

We reached the top of the cliff, where the opalescent river plunged down in the flaming fall. Ray chose convenient boulders for shelter and quickly we flung ourselves flat. Ray replaced the fired cartridges in the rifle and leveled it across the rock before him. I unslung the binoculars and focussed them.

"Watch 'em close," Ray muttered. "And tell me when to shoot."

The black lake lay below us, with the weird city of sapphire cylinders on its floor. I got the glasses upon Mildred's white form. Soon she dived from the

turquoise pedestal, swam swiftly ashore and vanished in the vivid fungous jungle. The wavering green antennae vanished below the water; I watched the crabs swimming away. Some of them climbed out of the water and lumbered off in various directions.

In fifteen minutes the slender white form of Mildred appeared at the foot of the ladder. She sprang over the dead crabs and scrambled nimbly up. Soon she was halfway up the face of the cliff, and there had been no sign of discovery. My hopes ran high.

I was sweeping the whole plain with the binoculars, while Ray peered through the telescopic sights of the rifle. Suddenly I saw a giant crab pause as he lumbered along the edge of the black lake. He rose upright; his shining green antennae wavered. Then I saw him reaching with a knobbed claw for a slender silver tube slung to his harness.

"Quick! The one by the lake! To the right of that canal!"

I pointed quickly. Ray swung his gun about, aimed. A

broad red beam flashed from the tube the thing carried, and fell upon the cliff. The report of Ray's rifle rang thunderously in my ears. The red ray was snapped off abruptly, and the giant crab rolled over into the black water of the lake. Half a dozen of the huge crabs were in sight. They all took alarm, probably having seen the flash of the red ray. They raised grotesque heads, twisted stalked eyes and waved green antennae. Some of them began to raise the metal tubes of the heat-ray.

"Let's get all there are in sight!" Ray muttered.

He began firing regularly, with deliberate precision. A few times he had to take two shots, but ordinarily one was enough to bring down a giant crab in a writhing red mass. Three times a red ray flashed out, once at the girl clambering up the ladder, twice at our position above the precipice. But the intense color of the ray announced its source, and Ray stopped each before it could be focussed to do damage.

I looked over at Mildred and saw that she was still climbing bravely, a little over a hundred feet below.

Then the great red crabs began to climb out of the water, heat-ray tubes grasped in their claws. Ray fired as fast as he could load and aim. Still he shot with deliberate care, and almost every shot was effective.

Intense, ruby-red rays flashed up from the lake shore. Twice, one of them beat scorchingly upon us for a moment. Once a rock beside us was fused and cracked with the heat. But Ray fired rapidly, and the rays winked out as fast as they were born.

He was powder-stained, black and grimy. The heat-ray had singed his clothing. He was dripping perspiration. The gun was so hot that he could hardly handle it. But still the angry bark of the rifle rang out, almost with a deliberate rhythm. Ray was a fine shot in his youth on his father's Arizona ranch, but his best shooting, I think, was done from above that cascade of liquid fire, at the hordes of monster scarlet crabs.

Mildred scrambled over the edge, unharmed. Her breast was heaving, but her face was bright with joy.

"You are wonderful!" she gasped to Ray.

We seized the packs and beat a hurried retreat. A crimson forest of the heat-rays flashed up behind us, and flamed upon the black walls and roof of the cavern until glistening lava became incandescent, cracked and fused.

We were below the line of the rays. Quickly we made the bend in the cavern and followed at a halting run up the path beside the shimmering river of opalescent light. Before us the torrent of fire fell in a magnificent flaming arc from the roof.

We rounded the pool of lambent milk of flame, passed the roaring torrent of coruscating liquid radiance and reached the ladder in the square, metal shaft. "If we can get to the top before they can get up here, we're safe," Ray said. "If we don't, this shaft will be a chimney of fire."

In the haste of desperation, we attacked the thousand-foot climb. I went first, Mildred below me, and Ray, with the rifle, in the rear. Our heavy packs were a terrible impediment, but we dared not attempt to go on without them. The metal rungs were four feet

apart; it was no easy task to scramble from one to the next, again and again, for hundreds of times.

It must have taken us an hour to make it. We should have been caught long before we reached the top, but the giant crabs were slow in their lumbering movements. Despite their evident intelligence, they seemed to lack anything like our railways and automobiles.

The cold gray light of the polar sky came about us; a dull, purple-blue square grew larger above. I clambered over the last rung, flung myself across the top of the metal shaft. Looking down at the tiny fleck of white light so far below, I saw a bit of red move in it.

"A crab!" I shouted. "Hurry!"

Mildred was just below me. I took her pack and helped her over the edge.

Red flame flared up the shaft.

We reached over, seized Ray's arms and fairly jerked him out of the ruby ray.

The bitterly cold wind struck our hot, perspiring bodies as we scrambled down the rungs outside the square metal shaft. Mildred shivered in her thin attire.

"Out of the frying pan into the ice box!" Ray jested grimly as we dropped, to the frozen plain.

Quickly we tore open our packs. Ray and I snatched out clothing and wrapped up the trembling girl. In a few minutes we had her snugly dressed in the fur garments that had been Major Meriden's. Then we got into the quilted garments we had made for ourselves.

The intensely red heat-beam still flared up the shaft. Ray looked at it in satisfaction.

"They'll have it so hot they can't get up it for some time yet," he remarked hopefully.

We shouldered our packs and set out over the wilderness of snow, turning our backs upon the metal-bound lake of fire, with the tall cone of iridescent flame rising in its center.

The deep, purple-blue sky was clear, and, for a rarity, there was not much wind. I doubt that the temperature was twenty below. But it was a violent change from the warm cavern. Mildred was blue and shivering.

In two hours the metal rim below the great white cone had vanished behind the black ice-crags. We passed near the wreck of Major Meriden's plane and reached our last camp, where we had left the tent sledge, primus stove, and most of our instruments. The tent was still stretched, though banked with snow. We got Mildred inside, chafed her hands, and soon had her comfortable.

Then Ray went out and soon returned with a sealed tin of oil from the wrecked plane, with which he lit the primus stove. Soon the tent was warm. We melted snow and cooked thick red soup. After the girl had

made a meal of the scalding soup, with the little golden cakes, she professed to be feeling as well as ever.

"We can fix our plane!" Ray said. "There's a perfectly good prop on Meriden's plane!"

We went back to the wreck, found the tools, and removed an undamaged propeller. This we packed on the sledge, with a good supply of fuel for the stove.

"I'm sure we're safe now, so far as the crab-things go," he said. "I don't fancy they'd get around very well in the snow."

In an hour we broke camp, and made ten miles of the distance back to the plane before we stopped. We were anxious about Mildred, but she seemed to stand the journey admirably; she is a marvelous physical specimen. She seemed running over with gay vivacity of spirit; she asked innumerable questions of the world which she had known only at second-hand from her mother's words.

The weather smiled on us during the march back to the plane as much as it had frowned on the terrible journey to the cone. We had an abundance of food and fuel, and we made it in eight easy stages. Once there was a light fall of snow, but the air was unusually warm and calm for the season.

We found the plane safe. It was the work of but a short time to remove the broken propeller and replace it with the one we had brought from the wrecked ship. We warmed and started the engine, broke the skids loose from the ice, turned the plane around, and took off safely from the tiny scrap of smooth ice.

Mildred seemed amazed and immensely delighted at the sensations of her first trip aloft.

A few hours later we were landing beside the *Albatross*, in the leaden blue sea beyond the ice barrier. Bluff Captain Harper greeted us in amazed delight as we climbed to the deck.

"You're just in time!" he said. "The relief expedition

we landed came back a week ago. We had no idea you could still be alive, with only a week's provisions. We were sailing to-morrow. But tell us! What happened? Your passenger—"

"We just stopped to pick up my fiancée," Ray grinned. "Captain, may I present Miss Mildred Meriden? We'll be wanting you to marry us right away."

83 The Ghost World by Sewell Peaslee Wright

Commander John Hanson records another of his thrilling interplanetary adventures with the Special Patrol Service.

Aproximate word count: 9,600

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

I was asleep when our danger was discovered, but I knew the instant the attention signal sounded that the situation was serious. Kincaide, my second officer, had a cool head, and he would not have called me except in a tremendous emergency.

"Hanson speaking!" I snapped into the microphone.
"What's up, Mr. Kincaide?"

"A field of meteorites sweeping into our path, sir."
Kincaide's voice was tense. "I have altered our course as much as I dared and am reducing speed at

emergency rate, but this is the largest swarm of meteorites I have ever seen. I am afraid that we must pass through at least a section of it."

"With you in a moment, Mr. Kincaide!" I dropped the microphone and snatched up my robe, knotting its cord about me as I hurried out of my stateroom. In those days, interplanetary ships did not have their auras of repulsion rays to protect them from meteorites, it must be remembered. Two skins of metal were all that lay between the *Ertak* and all the dangers of space.

I took the companionway to the navigating room two steps at a time and fairly burst into the room.

Kincaide was crouched over the two charts that pictured the space around us, microphone pressed to his lips. Through the plate glass partition I could see the men in the operating room tensed over their wheels and levers and dials. Kincaide glanced up as I entered, and motioned with his free hand towards the charts.

One glance convinced me that he had not overestimated our danger. The space to right and left, and above and below, was fairly peppered with tiny pricks of greenish light that moved slowly across the milky faces of the charts.

From the position of the ship, represented as a glowing red spark, and measuring the distances roughly by means of the fine black lines graved in both directions upon the surface of the chart, it was evident to any understanding observer that disaster of a most terrible kind was imminent.

Kincaide muttered into his microphone, and out of the tail of my eye I could see his orders obeyed on the instant by the men in the operating room. I could feel the peculiar, sickening surge that told of speed being reduced, and the course being altered, but the cold, brutally accurate charts before me assured me that no action we dared take would save us from the meteorites.

"We're in for it, Mr. Kincaide. Continue to reduce speed as much as possible, and keep bearing away, as

at present. I believe we can avoid the thickest portion of the field, but we shall have to take our chances with the fringe."

"Yes, sir!" said Kincaide, without lifting his eyes from the chart. His voice was calm and businesslike, now; with the responsibility on my shoulders, as commander, he was the efficient, level-headed thinking machine that had endeared him to me as both fellow-officer and friend.

Leaving the charts to Kincaide, I sounded the general emergency signal, calling every man and officer of the *Ertak's* crew to his post, and began giving orders through the microphone.

"Mr. Correy,"—Correy was my first officer—"please report at once to the navigating room. Mr. Hendricks, make the rounds of all duty posts, please, and give special attention to the disintegrator ray operators. The ray generators are to be started at once, full speed." Hendricks, I might say, was a junior officer, and a very good one, although quick-tempered and excitable—failings of youth. He had only recently

shipped with us to replace Anderson Croy, who—but that has already been recorded.

These preparations made, I glanced at the twin charts again. The peppering of tiny green lights, each of which represented a meteoritic body, had definitely shifted in relation to the position of the strongly-glowing red spark that was the *Ertak*, but a quick comparison of the two charts showed that we would be certain to pass through—again I use land terms to make my meaning clear—the upper right fringe of the field.

The great cluster of meteorites was moving in the same direction as ourselves now; Kincaide's change of course had settled that matter nicely. Naturally, this was the logical course, since should we come in contact with any of them, the impact would bear a relation to only the *difference* in our speeds, instead of the *sum*, as would be the case if we struck at a wide angle.

It was difficult to stand without grasping a support of some kind, and walking was almost impossible, for

the reduction of our tremendous speed, and even the slightest change of direction, placed terrific strains upon the ship and everything in it. Space ships, at space speeds, must travel like the old-fashioned bullets if those within are to feel at ease.

"I believe, Mr. Kincaide, it might be well to slightly increase the power in the gravity pads," I suggested. Kincaide nodded and spoke briefly into his microphone; an instant later I felt my weight increase perhaps fifty per cent, and despite the inertia of my body, opposed to both the change in speed and direction of the *Ertak*, I could now stand without support, and could walk without too much difficulty.

The door of the navigating room was flung open, and Correy entered, his face alight with curiosity and eagerness. An emergency meant danger, and few beings in the universe have loved danger more than Correy.

"We're in for it, Mr. Correy," I said, with a nod towards the charts. "Swarm of meteorites, and we can't avoid them."

"Well, we've dodged through them before, sir," smiled Correy. "We can do it again."

"I hope so, but this is the largest field of them I have ever seen. Look at the charts: they're thicker than flies."

Correy glanced at the charts, slapped Kincaide across his bowed, tense shoulders, and laughed aloud.

"Trust the old *Ertak* to worm her way through, sir," he said. "The ray crews are on duty, I presume?"

"Yes. But I doubt that the rays will be of much assistance to us. Particularly if these are stony meteorites—and as you know, the odds are about ten to one against their being of ferrous composition. The rays, deducting the losses due to the utter lack of a conducting medium, will be insufficient protection. They will help, of course. The iron meteorites they will take care of effectively, but the conglomerate nature of the stony meteorites does not make them particularly susceptible to the disintegrating rays.

"We shall do what we can, but our success will depend largely upon good luck—or Divine Providence."

"At any rate, sir," replied Correy, and his voice had lost some of its lightness, "we are upon routine patrol and not upon special mission. If we do crack up, there is no emergency call that will remain unanswered."

"No," I said dryly. "There will be just another 'Lost in Space' report in the records of the Service, and the *Ertak's* name will go up on the tablet of lost ships. In any case, we have done and shall do what we can. In ten minutes we shall know all there is to know. That about right, Mr. Kincaide?"

"Ten minutes?" Kincaide studied the charts with narrowed eyes, mentally balancing distance and speed. "We should be within the danger area in about that length of time, sir," he answered. "And out of it—if we come out—three or four minutes later."

"We'll come out of it," said Correy positively.

I walked heavily across the room and studied the charts again. Space above and below, to the right and the left of us, was powdered with the green points of light.

Correy joined me, his feet thumping with the unaccustomed weight given him by the increase in gravity. As he bent over the charts, I heard him draw in his breath sharply.

Kincaide looked up. Correy looked up. I looked up. The glance of each man swept the faces, read the eyes, of the other two. Then, with one accord, we all three glanced up at the clocks—more properly, at the twelve-figured dial of the Earth clock, for none of us had any great love for the metric Universal system of time-keeping.

Ten minutes.... Less than that, now.

"Mr. Correy," I said, as calmly as I could, "you will relieve Mr. Kincaide as navigating officer. Mr. Kincaide, present my compliments to Mr. Hendricks, and ask him to explain the situation to the crew. You

will instruct the disintegrator ray operators in their duties, and take charge of their activities. Start operation at your discretion; you understand the necessity."

"Yes, sir!" Kincaide saluted sharply, and I returned his salute. We did not shake hands, the Earth gesture of—strangely enough—both greeting and farewell, but we both realized that this might well be a final parting. The door closed behind him, and Correy and I were left together to watch the creeping hands of the Earth clock, the twin charts with their thick spatter of green lights, and the two fiery red sparks, one on each chart, that represented the *Ertak* sweeping recklessly towards the swarming danger ahead.

In other accounts of my experiences in the Special Patrol Service I feel that I have written too much about myself. After all, I have run my race; a retired commander of the Service, and an old, old man, with the century mark well behind me, my only use is to record, in this fashion, some of those things the Service accomplished in the old days when the worlds of the Universe were strange to each other, and space

travel was still an adventure to many.

The Universe is not interested in old men; it is concerned only with youth and action. It forgets that once we were young men, strong, impetuous, daring. It forgets what we did; but that has always been so. It always will be so. John Hanson, retired Commander of the Special Patrol Service, is fit only to amuse the present generation with his tales of bygone days.

Well, so be it. I am content. I have lived greatly; certainly I would not exchange my memories of those bold, daring days even for youth and strength again, had I to live that youth and waste that strength in this softened, gilded age.

But no more of this; it is too easy for an old man to rumble on about himself. It is only the young John Hanson, Commander of the *Ertak*, who can interest those who may pick up and read what I am writing here.

I did not waste the minutes measured by that clock, grouped with our other instruments in the navigating

room of the *Ertak*. I wrote hastily in the ship's log, stating the facts briefly and without feeling. If we came through, the log would read better thus; if not, and by some strange chance it came to human eyes, then the Universe would know at least that the *Ertak's* officers did not flinch from even such a danger.

As I finished the entry, Correy spoke:

"Kincaide's estimate was not far off, sir," he said, with a swift glance at the clock. "Here we go!" It was less than half a minute short of the ten estimated by Kincaide.

I nodded and bent over the television disc—one of the huge, hooded affairs we used in those days. Widening the field to the greatest angle, and with low power, I inspected the space before us on all sides.

The charts, operated by super-radio reflexes, had not lied about the danger into which we were passing—had passed. We were in the midst of a veritable swarm of meteorites of all sizes.

They were not large; I believe the largest I saw had a mass of not more than three or four times that of the *Ertak* herself. Some of the smaller bodies were only fifty or sixty feet in diameter.

They were jagged and irregular in shape, and they seemed to spin at varying speeds, like tiny worlds.

As I watched, fixing my view now on the space directly in our path, I saw that our disintegrator ray men were at work. Deep in the bowels of the *Ertak*, the moan of the ray generators had deepened in note; I could even feel the slight vibration beneath my feet.

One of the meteorites slowly crumbled on top, the dust of disintegration hovering in a compact mass about the body. More and more of it melted away. The spinning motion grew irregular, eccentric, as the center of gravity was changed by the action of the ray.

Another ray, two more, centered on the wobbling mass. It was directly in our path, looming up larger and larger every second.

Faster and faster it melted, the rays eating into it from four sides. But it was perilously near now; I had to reduce power in order to keep all of it within the field of my disc. If—

The thing vanished before the very nose of the ship, not an instant too soon. I glanced up at the surface temperature indicator, and saw the big black hand move slowly for a degree or two, and stop. It was a very sensitive instrument, and registered even the slight friction of our passage through the disintegrated dust of the meteorite.

Our rays were working desperately, but disintegrator rays are not nearly so effective in space as in an atmosphere of some kind. Half a dozen times it seemed that we must crash head on into one of the flying bodies, but our speed was reduced now to such an extent that we were going but little faster than the meteorites, and this fact was all that saved us. We had more time for utilizing our rays.

We nosed upward through the trailing fringe of the swarm in safety. The great field of meteorites was

now below and ahead of us. We had won through! The *Ertak* was safe, and—

"There seems to be another directly above us, sir," commented Correy quietly, speaking for the first time since we had entered the area of danger. "I believe your disc is not picking it up."

"Thank you, Mr. Correy," I said. While operating on an entirely different principle, his two charts had certain very definite advantages: they showed the entire space around us, instead of but a portion.

I picked up the meteorite he had mentioned without difficulty. It was a large body, about three times the mass of the *Ertak*, and some distance above us—a laggard in the group we had just eluded.

"Will it coincide with our path at any point, Mr. Correy?" I asked doubtfully. The television disc could not, of course, give me this information.

"I believe so; yes," replied Correy, frowning over his charts. "Are the rays on it, sir?"

"Yes. All of them, I judge, but they are making slow work of it." I fell silent, bending lower over the great hooded disc.

There were a dozen, a score of rays playing upon the surface of the meteorite. A halo of dust hung around the rapidly diminishing body, but still the mass melted all too slowly.

Pressing the attention signal for Kincaide, I spoke sharply into the microphone:

"Mr. Kincaide, is every ray on that large meteorite above us?"

"Yes, sir," he replied instantly.

"Full power?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well; carry on, Mr. Kincaide." I turned to Correy; he had just glanced from his charts to the clock, with its jerking second hand, and back to his

charts.

"They'll have to do it in the next ten seconds, sir," he said. "Otherwise—" Correy shrugged, and his eyes fixed with a peculiar, fascinated stare on the charts. He was looking death squarely in the eyes.

Ten seconds! It was not enough. I had watched the rays working, and I knew their power to disintegrate this death-dealing stone that was hurtling along above us while we rose, helplessly, into its path.

I did not ask Correy if it was possible to alter the course enough, and quickly enough, to avoid that fateful path. Had it been possible without tearing the *Ertak* to pieces with the strain of it, Correy would have done it seconds ago.

I glanced up swiftly at the relentless, jerking second hand. Seven seconds gone! Three seconds more.

The rays were doing all that could be expected of them. There was only a tiny fragment of the meteorite left, and it was dwindling swiftly. But our time was

passing even more rapidly.

The bit of rock loomed up at me from the disc. It seemed to fly up into my face, to meet me.

"Got us, Correy!" I said hoarsely. "Good-by, old-man!"

I think he tried to reply. I saw his lips open; the flash of the bright light from the ethon tubes on his big white teeth.

Then there was a crash that shook the whole ship. I shot into the air. I remember falling ... terribly.

A blinding flash of light that emanated from the very center of my brain, a sickening sense of utter catastrophe, and ... blackness.

I think I was conscious several seconds before I finally opened my eyes. My mind was still wandering; my thoughts kept flying around in huge circles that kept closing in.

We had hit the meteorite. I remembered the crash. I

remembered falling. I remembered striking my head.

But I was still alive. There was air to breathe and there was firm material under me. I opened my eyes.

For the first instant, it seemed I was in an utterly strange room. Nothing was familiar. Everything was—was *inverted*. Then I glanced upward, and I saw what had happened.

I was lying on the ceiling of the navigating room. Over my head were the charts, still glowing, the chronometers in their gimballed beds, and the television disc. Beside me, sprawled out limply, was Correy, a trickle of dried blood on his cheek. A litter of papers, chairs, framed licenses and other movable objects were strewn on and around us.

My first instinctive, foolish thought was that the ship was upside down. Man has a ground-trained mind, no matter how many years he may travel space. Then, of course, I realized that in the open void there is not top nor bottom; the illusion is supplied, in space ships, by the gravity pads. Somehow, the shock of

impact had reversed the polarity of the leads to the pads, and they had become repulsion pads. That was why I had dropped from the floor to the ceiling.

All this flashed through my mind in an instant as I dragged myself toward Correy. Dragged myself because my head was throbbing so that I dared not stand up, and one shoulder, my left, was numb.

For an instant I thought that Correy was dead. Then, as I bent over him, I saw a pulse leaping just under the angle of his jaw.

"Correy, old man!" I whispered. "Do you hear me?" All the formality of the Service was forgotten for the time. "Are you hurt badly?"

His eyelids flickered, and he sighed; then, suddenly, he looked up at me—and smiled!

"We're still here, sir?"

"After a fashion. Look around; see what's happened?"

He glanced about curiously, frowning. His wits were not all with him yet.

"We're in a mess, aren't we?" he grinned. "What's the matter?"

I told him what I thought, and he nodded slowly, feeling his head tenderly.

"How long ago did it happen?" he asked. "The blooming clock's upside down; can you read it?"

I could—with an effort.

"Over twenty minutes," I said. "I wonder how the rest of the men are?"

With an effort, I got to my feet and peered into the operating room. Several of the men were moving about, dazedly, and as I signalled to them, reassuringly, a voice hailed us from the doorway:

"Any orders, sir?"

It was Kincaide. He was peering over what had been the top of the doorway, and he was probably the most disreputable-looking officer who had ever worn the blue-and-silver uniform of the Service. His nose was bloody and swollen to twice its normal size. Both eyes were blackened, and his hair, matted with blood, was plastered in ragged swirls across his forehead.

"Yes, Mr. Kincaide; plenty of them. Round up enough of the men to locate the trouble with the gravity pads; there's a reversed connection somewhere. But don't let them make the repairs until the signal is given. Otherwise, we'll all fall on our heads again. Mr. Correy and I will take care of the injured."

The next half hour was a trying one. Two men had been killed outright, and another died before we could do anything to save him. Every man in the crew was shaken up and bruised, but by the time the check was completed, we had a good half of our personnel on duty.

Returning at last to the navigating room, I pressed the attention signal for Kincaide, and got his answer

immediately.

"Located the trouble yet, Mr. Kincaide?" I asked anxiously.

"Yes, sir! Mr. Hendricks has been working with a group of men and has just made his report. They are ready when you are."

"Good!" I drew a sigh of relief. It had been easier than I thought. Pressing the general attention signal, I broadcasted the warning, giving particular instructions to the men in charge of the injured. Then I issued orders to Hendricks:

"Reverse the current in five seconds, Mr. Hendricks, and stand by for further instructions."

Hastily, then, Correy and I followed the orders we had given the men. Briefly we stood on our heads against the wall, feeling very foolish, and dreading the fall we knew was coming.

It came. We slid down the wall and lit heavily on our

feet, while the litter that had been on the ceiling with us fell all around us. Miraculously, the ship seemed to have righted herself. Correy and I picked ourselves up and looked around.

"We're still operating smoothly," I commented with a sweeping glance at the instruments over the operating table. "Everything seems in order."

"Did you notice the speed indicator, sir?" asked Correy grimly. "When he fell, one of the men in the operating room must have pulled the speed lever all the way over. We're at maximum space speed, sir, and have been for nearly an hour, with no one at the controls."

We stared at each other dully. Nearly an hour, at maximum space speed—a speed seldom used except in case of great emergency. With no one at the controls, and the ship set at maximum deflection from her course.

That meant that for nearly an hour we had been sweeping into infinite space in a great arc, at a speed

I disliked to think about.

"I'll work out our position at once," I said, "and in the meantime, reduce speed to normal as quickly as possible. We must get back on our course at the earliest possible moment."

We hurried across to the charts that were our most important aides in proper navigation. By comparing the groups of stars there with our space charts of the universe, the working out of our position was ordinarily, a simple matter.

But now, instead of milky rectangles, ruled with fine black lines, with a fiery red speck in the center and the bodies of the universe grouped around in green points of light, there were only nearly blank rectangles, shot through with vague, flickering lights that revealed nothing except the presence of disaster.

"The meteoric fragment wiped out some of our plates, I imagine," said Correy slowly. "The thing's useless."

I nodded, staring down at the crawling lights on the

charts.

"We'll have to set down for repairs, Mr. Correy. If," I added, "we can find a place."

Correy glanced up at the attraction meter.

"I'll take a look in the big disc," he suggested.

"There's a sizeable body off to port. Perhaps our luck's changed."

He bent his head under the big hood, adjusting the controls until he located the source of the registered attraction.

"Right!" he said, after a moment's careful scrutiny.

"She's as big as Earth, I'd venture, and I believe I can detect clouds, so there should be atmosphere. Shall we try it, sir?"

"Yes. We're helpless until we make repairs. As big as Earth, you said? Is she familiar?"

Correy studied the image under the hood again, long

and carefully.

"No, sir," he said, looking up and shaking his head.

"She's a new one on me."

Conning the ship first by means of the television disc, and navigating visually as we neared the strange sphere, we were soon close enough to make out the physical characteristics of this unknown world.

Our spectroscopic tests had revealed the presence of atmosphere suitable for breathing, although strongly laden with mineral fumes which, while possibly objectionable, would probably not be dangerous.

So far as we could see, there was but one continent, somewhat north of the equator, roughly triangular in shape, with its northernmost point reaching nearly to the Pole.

"It's an unexplored world, sir. I'm certain of that," said Correy. "I am sure I would have remembered that single, triangular continent had I seen it on any of our charts." In those days, of course, the Universe was by

no means so well mapped as it is today.

"If not unknown, it is at least uncharted," I replied.

"Rough looking country, isn't it? No sign of life, either, that the disc will reveal."

"That's as well, sir. Better no people than wild natives who might interfere with our work. Any choice in the matter of a spot on which to set her down?"

I inspected the great, triangular continent carefully. Towards the north it was a mass of snow covered mountains, some of them, from their craters, dead volcanoes. Long spurs of these ranges reached southward, with green and apparently fertile valleys between. The southern edge was covered with dense tropical vegetation; a veritable jungle.

"At the base of that central spur there seems to be a sort of plateau," I suggested. "I believe that would be a likely spot."

"Very well, sir," replied Correy, and the old *Ertak*, reduced to atmospheric speed, swiftly swept toward

the indicated position, while Correy kept a wary eye on the surface temperature gauge, and I swept the terrain for any sign of intelligent life.

I found a number of trails, particularly around the base of the foothills, but they were evidently game trails, for there were no dwelling places of any kind; no cities, no villages, not even a single habitation of any kind that the searching eyes of the disc could detect.

Correy set her down as neatly and as softly as a rose petal drifts to the ground. Roses, I may add, are a beautiful and delicate flower, with very soft petals, peculiar to my native Earth.

We opened the main exit immediately. I watched the huge, circular door back slowly out of its threads, and finally swing aside, swiftly and silently, in the grip of its mighty gimbals, with the weird, unearthly feeling I have always had when about to step foot on some strange star where no man has trod before.

The air was sweet, and delightfully fresh after being

cooped up for weeks in the *Ertak*, with her machine-made air. A little thinner, I should judge, than the air to which we were accustomed, but strangely exhilarating, and laden with a faint scent of some unknown constituent—undoubtedly the mineral element our spectroscope had revealed but not identified. Gravity, I found upon passing through the exit, was normal. Altogether an extremely satisfactory repair station.

Correy's guess as to what had happened proved absolutely accurate. Along the top of the *Ertak*, from amidships to within a few feet of her pointed stem, was a jagged groove that had destroyed hundreds of the bright, coppery discs, set into the outer skin of the ship, that operated our super-radio reflex charts. The groove was so deep, in places, that it must have bent the outer skin of the *Ertak* down against the inner skin. A foot or more—it was best not to think of what would have happened then.

By the time we completed our inspection dusk was upon us—a long, lingering dusk, due, no doubt, to the afterglow resulting from the mineral content of the

air. I'm no white-skinned, stoop-shouldered laboratory man, so I'm not sure that was the real reason. It sounds logical, however.

"Mr. Correy, I think we shall break out our field equipment and give all men not on watch an opportunity to sleep out in the fresh air," I said. "Will you give the orders, please?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Hendricks will stand the eight to twelve watch as usual?"

I nodded.

"Mr. Kincaide will relieve him at midnight, and you will take over at four."

"Very well, sir." Correy turned to give the orders, and in a few minutes an orderly array of shelter tents made a single street in front of the fat, dully-gleaming side of the *Ertak*. Our tents were at the head of this short company street, three of them in a little row.

After the evening meal, cooked over open fires, with

the smoke of the very resinous wood we had collected hanging comfortably in the still air, the men gave themselves up to boisterous, noisy games, which, I confess, I should have liked very much to participate in. They raced and tumbled around the two big fires like schoolboys on a lark. Only those who have spent most of their days in the metal belly of a space ship know the sheer joy of utter physical freedom.

Correy, Kincaide and I sat before our tents and watched them, chatting about this and that—I have long since forgotten what. But I shall never forget what occurred just before the watch changed that night. Nor will any man of the *Ertak's* crew.

It was just a few minutes before midnight. The men had quieted down and were preparing to turn in. I had given orders that this first night they could suit themselves about retiring; a good officer, and I tried to be one, is never afraid to give good men a little rein, now and then.

The fires had died down to great heaps of red coals, filmed with ashes, and, aside from the brilliant galaxy

of stars overhead, there was no light from above. Either this world had no moons, not even a single moon, like my native Earth, or it had not yet arisen.

Kincaide rose lazily, stretched himself, and glanced at his watch.

"Seven till twelve, sir," he said. "I believe I'll run along and relieve—"

He never finished that sentence. From somewhere there came a rushing sound, and a damp, stringy net, a living, horrible, *something*, descended upon us out of the night.

In an instant, what had been an orderly encampment became a bedlam. I tried to fight against the stringy, animated, nearly intangible mass, or masses, that held me, but my arms, my legs, my whole body, was bound as with strings and loops of elastic bands.

Strange whispering sounds filled the air, audible above the shouting of the men. The net about me grew tighter; I felt myself being lifted from the

ground. Others were being treated the same way; one of the *Ertak's* crew shot straight up, not a dozen feet away, writhing and squirming. Then, at an elevation of perhaps twice my height, he was hurried away.

Hendrick's voice called out my name from the *Ertak's* exit, and I shouted a warning:

"Hendrick! Go back! Close the emergency—" Then a gluey mass cut across my mouth, and, as though carried on huge soft springs, I was hurried away, with the sibilant, whispering sounds louder and closer than ever. With me, as nearly as I could judge, went every man who had not been on duty in the ship.

I ceased struggling, and immediately the rubbery network about me loosened. It seemed to me that the whisperings about me were suddenly approving. We were in the grip, then, of some sort of intelligent beings, ghost-like and invisible though they were.

After a time, during which we were all, in a ragged group, being borne swiftly towards the mountains, all at a common level from the ground, I managed to turn

my head so that I could see, against the star-lit sky, something of the nature of the things that had made us captive.

As is not infrequently the case, in trying to describe things of an utterly different world, I find myself at a loss for words. I think of jellyfish, such as inhabit the seas of most of the inhabited planets, and yet this is not a good description.

These creatures were pale, and almost completely transparent. What their forms might be, I could not even guess. I could make out writhing, tentacle-like arms, and wrinkled, flabby excrudesences and that was all. That these creatures were huge, was evident from the fact that they, apparently walking, from the irregular, undulating motion, held us easily ten or a dozen feet from the ground.

With the release of the pressure about my body I was able to talk again, and I called out to Correy, who was fighting his way along, muttering, angrily, just ahead of me.

"Correy! No use fighting them. Save your strength, man!"

"Then? What are they, in God's name? What spawn of hell—"

"The Commander is right, Correy," interrupted Kincaide, who was not far from my first officer. "Let's get our breaths and try to figure out what's happened. I'm winded!" His voice gave plentiful evidence of the struggle he had put up.

"I want to know where I'm going, and why!" growled Correy, ceasing his struggling, nevertheless. "What have us? Are they fish or flesh or fowl?"

"I think we shall know before very long, Correy," I replied. "Look ahead!"

The bearers of the men in the fore part of the group had apparently stopped before a shadowy wall, like the face of a cliff. Rapidly, the rest of us were brought up, until we were in a compact group, some in sitting positions, some upside down, the majority reclining

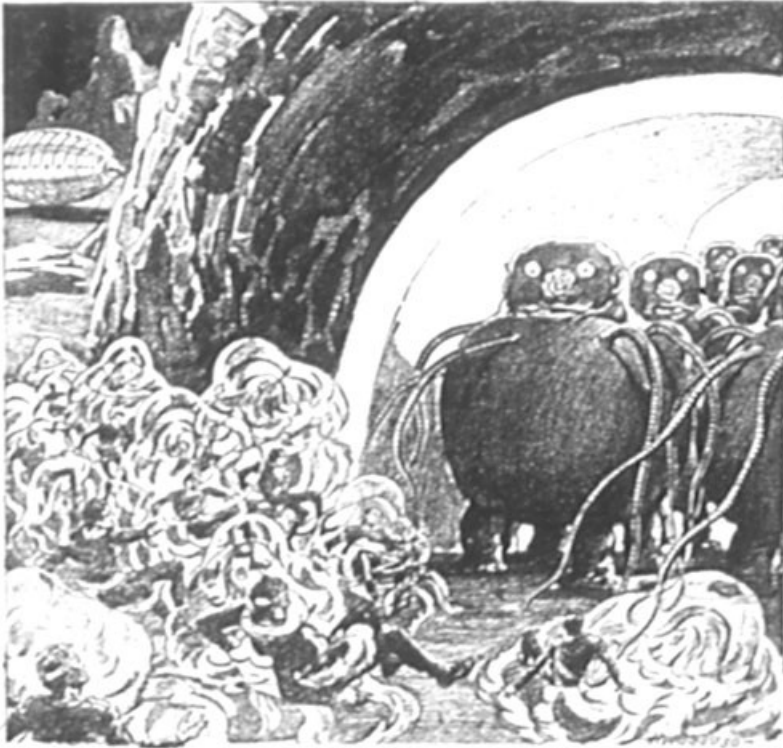
on back or side. The whispering sound now was intense and excited, as though our strange bearers awaited some momentous happening.

I took advantage of the opportunity to speak very briefly to my companions.

"Men, I'll admit frankly that I don't know what we're up against," I said. "But I do know this: we'll come out on top of the heap. Conserve your strength, keep your eyes open, and be prepared to obey, instantly, any orders that may be issued: I know that last remark is not needed. If any of you should see or learn something of interest or value, report at once to Mr. Correy, Mr. Kincaide or my—"

A simultaneous, involuntary exclamation from the men interrupted me, and it was not surprising that this was so, for the wall before us had suddenly opened, and there was a great burst of yellow light in our faces. A strong odor, like the faint scent we had first noticed in the air, but infinitely more powerful, struck our nostrils, but I was not conscious of the fact for several seconds. My whole attention, my every

startled thought, was focused upon the group of strange beings, silhouetted against the glowing light, that stood in the opening.



Imagine, if you can, a huge globe, perhaps eight feet in diameter, flattened slightly at the bottom, and supported on six short, huge stumps, like the feet of an elephant, and topped by an excrudescence like a rounded coning tower, merging into the globular body. From points slightly below this excrudescence, visualize six long, limp tentacles, so long that they drop from the equators of these animated spheres, and trail on the ground. Now you have some

conception of the beings that stood before us.

A sharp, sibilant whispering came from one of these figures, to be answered in an eager chorus from our bearers. There was a reply like a command, and the group in the doorway marched forward. One by one these visible tentacles wrapped themselves around a member of the *Ertak's* crew, each one of the globular creatures bearing one of us.

I heard a disappointed whisper go up from the outer darkness where, but a moment before, we had been. Then there was a grating sound, and a thud as the stone doorway was rolled back into place.

The entrance was sealed. We were prisoners indeed!

"All right, now what?" gritted Correy. "God! If I ever get a hand loose!"

Swiftly, each of us held above the head-like excrudescence atop the globular body of the thing that held us, we were carried down a widening rocky corridor, towards the source of the yellow light that

beat about us.

The passage led to a great cavern, irregular in shape, and apparently possessed of numerous other outlets which converged here.

I am not certain as to the size of the cavern, save that it was great, and that the roof was so high in most sections that it was lost in shadow.

The great cavern was nearly filled with creatures similar to those which were bearing us, and they fell back in orderly passage to permit our conductors to pass.

I could see, now, that the hump atop each rounded body was a travesty of a head, hairless, and without a neck. Their features were particularly hideous, and I shall pass over a description as rapidly as possible.

The eyes were round, and apparently lidless; a pale drab or bluff in color. Instead of a nose, as we understand the term, they had a convoluted rosette in the center of the face, not unlike the olfactory organ

of a bat. Their ears were placed as are ours, but were of thin, pale parchment, and hugged the side of the head tightly. Instead of a mouth, there was a slightly depressed oval of fluttering skin near the point where the head melted into the rounded body: the rapid fluttering or vibration of this skin produced the whispering sound I have already remarked.

The cavern, as I have said, was flooded with yellow light, which came from a great column of fire near the center of the clear space. I had no opportunity to inspect the exact arrangements but from what I did see, I judged that this flame was fed by some sort of highly inflammable substance, not unlike crude oil, except that it burned clearly and without smoke. This substance was conducted to the font from which the flame leaped by means of a large pipe of hollow reed or wood.

At the far end of the cavern a procession entered from one of the passages—nine figures similar to those which bore us, save that by the greater darkness of their skin, and the wrinkles upon both face and body, I judged these to be older than the rest. From the

respect with which they were treated, and the dignity of their movements, I gathered that these were persons of authority, a surmise which quickly verified itself.

These nine elders arranged themselves, standing, in the form of a semicircle, the center creature standing a pace or two in front of the others. At a whispered command, we were all dumped unceremoniously on the floor of the cavern before this august council of nine.

Nine pairs of fish-like, unblinking eyes inspected us, whether with enmity or otherwise; I could not determine. One of the nine spoke briefly to one of our conductors, and received an even more brief reply.

I felt the gaze of the creature in the center fix on me. I had taken my proper position in front of my men; he apparently recognized me as the leader of the group.

In a sharp whisper, he addressed me; I gathered from the tone that he uttered a command, but I could only shake my head in response. No words could convey

thought from his mind to mine—but we did have a means of communication at hand.

"Mr. Correy," I said, "your menore, please!" I released my own from the belt which held it, along with the other expeditionary equipment which we always wore when outside our ship, and placed it in position upon my head, motioning for one of the nine to do likewise with Correy's menore.

They watched me suspiciously, despite my attempt to convey, by gestures, that by means of these instruments we could convey thoughts to each other. The menores of those days were bulky, heavy things, and undoubtedly they looked dangerous to these creatures: thought-transference instruments at that time were complicated affairs.

However, I must have made myself partially understood, at least, for the chief of the nine uttered a whispered command to one of the beings who had borne us to the large cavern, and motioned with a writhing gesture of one tentacle that I was to place the menore upon this creature's head.

"The old boy's playing it safe, sir," muttered Correy, chuckling. "Wants to try it out on the dog first."

"Right!" I nodded, and, not without difficulty, placed the other menore upon the rounded dome of the individual selected for the trial.

Both instruments were adjusted to full power, and I concentrated my mental energy upon the simple pictures that I thought I could convey to the limited mentality of which I suspected these creatures, watching his fishy eyes the while.

It was several seconds before he realized what was happening; then he began talking excitedly to the waiting nine. The words fairly burned themselves in my consciousness, but of course were utterly unintelligible to me. Before the creature had finished, a lash-like tentacle shot out from the chief of the nine and removed the menore; a moment later it reposed, at a rather rakish slant, on the shining dome of its new possessor.

"Get anything, sir?" asked Correy in a low voice.

"Not yet. I'm trying to make him see how we came here, and that we're friends. Then I'll see what I can get out of him; he'll have to get the idea of coming back at me with pictures instead of words, and it may take a long time to make him understand."

It did take a long time. I could feel the sweat trickling down my face as I strove to make him understand. His eyes revealed wonderment and a little fear, but an almost utter lack of understanding.

I pictured for him the heavens, and our ship sailing along through space. Then I showed him the *Ertak* coming to rest on the plateau, and he made little impatient noises as though to convey that he knew all about that.

After a long time he got the idea. Crudely, dimly, he pictured the *Ertak* leaving this strange world, and soaring off into vacant space. Then his scene faded out, and he pictured the same thing again, as one might repeat a question not understood. He wanted to know where we would go if we left this world of his.

I pictured for him other worlds, peopled with men more or less like myself. I showed him the great cities, and the fleets of ships like the *Ertak* that plied between them. Then, as best I could, I asked him about himself and his people.

It came to me jerkily and poorly pictured, but I managed to piece out the story. Whether I guess correctly on all points, I am not sure, nor will I ever be sure. But this is the story as I got it.

These people at one time lived in the open, and all the people of this world were like those in the cavern, possessed of opaque bodies and great strength. There were none of the ghost-like creatures who had captured us.

But after a long time, a ruling class arose. They tried to dominate the masses, and the masses refused to be dominated. But the ruling classes were wise, and versed in certain sciences; the masses were ignorant. So the ruling classes devised a plan.

These creatures did not eat. There was a tradition

that at one time they had had mouths, as I had, but that was not known. Their strength, their vitality, came from the powerful mineral vapor which came forth from the bowels of the earth. The ruling classes decided that if they could control the supply of this vapor, they would have the whip hand, and they set about realizing this condition.

It was quickly done. All the sources of supply, save one, were sealed. This one source of supply was the cavern in which we stood. These were members of the ruling class, and outside was the rabble, starved and unhappy, living on the faint seepage of the vital fumes, without which they became almost bodiless, and the helpless slaves of those within the cavern.

These creatures, then, were boneless; as boneless as sponges, and, like sponges, capable of absorbing huge quantities of a foreign substance, which distended them and gave them weight. I could see, now, why the rotund bodies sagged and flattened at the base, and why six short, stubby legs were needed to support that body. There was only tissue, unsupported by bone, to bear the weight!

This chief of the nine went on to show me how ruthlessly, how cruelly those within the cavern ruled those without. The substance that fed the flame had to be gathered and a great reservoir on the side of the mountain kept filled. Great masses of dry, sweet grass, often changed, must be harvested and brought to the entrance of the cavern, for bedding. A score of other tasks kept the outsiders busy always—and the driving force was that, did the slaves become disobedient, the slight supply of mineral vapor available in the outside world would be cut off utterly, and all outside would surely die, slowly and in agony.

Those within the cavern were the rulers. They would always remain the rulers, and those outside would remain the slaves to wait upon them. And we—how strangely he pictured us, as he saw us!—were not to return to our queer worlds, that we might bring many other ships like the *Ertak* back to interfere. No.

The pupils of his eyes contracted, and the leafy structure of his nose fluttered as though with strong emotion.

No, we would not go back. He would give a signal to those of his creatures who stood behind us—a sort of soldiery, I gathered—and our heads, our legs, our arms, would be torn from our bodies. Then we would not go back to bring—

That was enough for me.

"Men!" I spoke softly, but with an intensity that gave me their instant attention, "it's going to be a fight for life. When I give the signal, make a rush for the entrance by which we came in. I'll lead the way. Use your pistols, and your bombs if necessary. All right—forward!"

Correy's great shout rang out after mine, and I flung my menore in the face of the nearest guard. It bounced off as though it had struck a rubber ball. Behind me, one of the men called out sharply; I heard a sharp crunch of bone, and with a pang realized that the *Ertak's* log would have at least one death to record.

A dozen tentacles lashed out at me, and I sprayed

their owners with pellets from my atomic pistol. The air was filled with the shouts of my men and the whispers of our enemies. All around me I could hear the screaming of ricochets from our pistols. Twice atomic bombs exploded not far away, and the solid rock shook beneath my feet. Something shot by close to my face; an instant later a limp bundle in the blue and silver uniform of our Service struck the rock wall of the cavern, thirty feet away. The strength in those rubbery tentacles was terrible.

The pistols seemed to have but little effect. They wounded, but they did not kill unless the pellet struck the head. Then the victim rolled over, rocking idiotically on its middle.

"In the head, men!" I shouted. "That downs them! And keep the bombs in action. Throw them against the walls of the cavern. Take a chance!"

A ragged cheer went up, and I heard Correy's voice raised in angry conversation with the enemy:

"You will, eh? There!... Now!... Ah!—right—through—

the—eye. That's—the place!"

A score of times I was grasped and held by the writhing arms of the angry horde whispering all around me. Each time I literally shot the tentacle away with my atomic pistol, leaving the severed end to unwrap itself and drop from my struggling body. The things had no blood in them.

Steadily, we fought our way toward the doorway, out of the cavern, down the passageway, pressed into a compact, sweating mass by the pressure of the eager bodies around us. I have never heard any sound even remotely like the babel of angry, sibilant whispering that beat against the walls and roof of that cavern.

I had saved my own bombs for a specific purpose, and now I unslung them and managed to work them up above my shoulders, one in either hand.

"I'm going to try to blow the entrance clear, men," I shouted. "The instant I fling the bombs, drop! The fragments will be stopped by the enemy crowding around us. One ... two ... three ... *drop!*"

The two bombs exploded almost simultaneously. The ground shook, and all over the cavern masses of stone came crashing to the floor. Bits of rock hummed and shrieked over our heads. And—yes! There was a draft of cooler, purer air on our faces. The bombs had done their work.

"One more effort and we're outside, men," I called.

"The passage is open, and there are only a few of the enemy before us. Ready?"

"Ready!" went up the hoarse shout.

"Then, forward!"

It was easy to give the command, but hard to execute it. We were pressed so hard that only the men on the outside of the group could use their weapons. And our captors were making a terrible, desperate effort to hold us.

Two more of our men were literally torn to pieces before my eyes, but I had the satisfaction of ripping holes in the heads of the creatures whose tentacles

had done the beastly work. And in the meantime we were working our way slowly but surely to the entrance.

I glanced up as I dodged out into the open. That soft humming sound was familiar, and properly so. There, at an elevation of less than fifty feet, was the *Ertak*, with Hendricks standing in the exit, leaning forward at a perilous angle.

"Ahoy the *Ertak*!" I hailed. "Descend at once!"

"Right, sir!" Hendricks turned to relay the order, and, as the rest of the men burst forth from the cavern, the ship struck the ground before us.

"All hands board ship!" I ordered. "Lively, now." As many years as I have commanded men, I have never seen an order obeyed with more alacrity.

I was the last man to enter, and as I did so, I turned for a last glance at the enemy.

They could not come through the small opening my

bombs had driven in the rock, although they were working desperately to enlarge it. Leaping back and forth between me and the entrance I could see the vague, shadowy figures of the outside slaves, eagerly seeping up the life-giving fumes that escaped from the cavern.

"Your orders, sir?" asked Hendricks anxiously; he was a very young officer, and he had been through a very trying experience.

"Ascend five hundred feet, Mr. Hendricks," I said thoughtfully. "Directly over this spot. Then I'll take over.

"It isn't often," I added, "that the Service concerns itself with economic conditions. This, however, is one of the exceptions."

"Yes, sir," said Hendricks, for the very good reason, I suppose, that that was about all a third officer could say to his commander, under the circumstances.

"Five hundred feet, sir," said Hendricks.

"Very well," I nodded, and pressed the attention signal of the non-commissioned officer in charge of the big forward ray projector.

"Ott? Commander Hanson speaking. I have special orders for you."

"Yes, sir!"

"Direct your ray, narrowed to normal beam and at full intensity, on the spot directly below. Keep the ray motionless, and carry on until further orders. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly, sir." The disintegrator ray generators deepened their purr as I turned away.

"I trust, sir, that I did the right thing in following you with the *Ertak*?" asked Hendricks. "I was absolutely without precedent, and the circumstances were so mysterious—"

"You handled the situation very well indeed," I told him. "Had you not been waiting when we fought our

way into the open, the nearly invisible things on the outside might have—but you don't know about them yet."

Picking up the microphone again, I ordered a pair of searchlights to follow the disintegrator ray, and made my way forward, where I could observe activities through a port.

The ray was boring straight down into a shoulder of a rocky hill, and the bright beams of the searchlights glowed redly with the dust of disintegration. Here and there I could see the shadowy, transparent forms of the creatures that the self-constituted rulers of this world had doomed to a demi-existence, and I smiled grimly to myself. The tables would soon be turned.

For perhaps an hour the ray melted its way into the solid rock, while I stood beside Ott and his crew, watching. Then, down below us, things began to happen.

Little fragments of rock flew up from the shaft the ray had drilled. Jets of black mud leaped into the air.

There was a sudden blast from below that rocked the *Ertak*, and the shaft became a miniature volcano, throwing rocky fragments and mud high into the air.

"Very good, Ott," I said triumphantly. "Cease action." As I spoke, the first light of the dawn, unnoticed until now, spread itself over the scene, and we witnessed then one of the strangest scenes that the Universe has ever beheld.

Up to the very edge of that life-giving blast of mineral-laden gas the tenuous creatures came crowding. There were hundreds of them, thousands of them. And they were still coming, crowding closer and closer and closer, a mass of crawling, yellowish shadows against the sombre earth.

Slowly, they began to fill out and darken, as they drew in the fumes that were more than bread and meat and water to us. Where there had been formless shadows, rotund creatures such as we had met in the cavern stood and lashed their tentacles about in a sort of frenzied gladness, and fell back to make room for their brothers.

"It's a sight to make a man doubt his own eyes, sir," said Correy, who had come to stand beside me. "Look at them! Thousands of them pouring from every direction. How did it happen?"

"It didn't happen. I used our disintegrator ray as a drill; we simply sunk a huge shaft down into the bowels of the earth until we struck the source of the vapor which the self-appointed 'ruling class' has bottled up. We have emancipated a whole people, Mr. Correy."

"I hate to think of what will happen to those in the cavern," replied Correy, smiling grimly. "Or rather, since you've told me of the pleasant little death they had arranged for us. I'm mighty glad of it. They'll receive rough treatment, I'm afraid!"

"They deserve it. It has been a great sight to watch, but I believe we've seen enough. It has been a good night's work, but it's daylight, now, and it will take hours to repair the damage to the *Ertak's* hull. Take over in the navigating room, if you will, and pick a likely spot where we will not be disturbed. We should

be on our course by to-night, Mr. Correy."

"Right, sir," said Correy, with a last wondering look at the strange miracle we had brought to pass on the earth below us. "It will seem good to be off in space again, away from the troubles of these little worlds."

"There are troubles in space, too," I said dryly, thinking of the swarm of meteorites that had come so close to wiping the *Ertak* off the records of the Service. "You can't escape trouble even in space."

"No, sir," said Correy from the doorway. "But you can get your sleep regularly!"

And sleep is, when one comes to think of it, a very precious thing.

Particularly for an old man, whose eyelids are heavy with years.

May 1931

84 Dark Moon by Charles Willard Diffin

Mysterious, dark, out of the unknown deep comes a new satellite to lure three courageous Earthlings on to strange adventures.

Aproximate word count: 29,000

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

Chapter 1: There Comes a New World

Mysterious, dark, out of the unknown deep comes a new satellite to lure three courageous Earthlings on to strange adventures.

The one hundred and fifty-ninth floor of the great Transportation Building allowed one standing at a window to look down upon the roofs of the countless buildings that were New York.

Flat-decked, all of them; busy places of hangars and

machine shops and strange aircraft, large and small, that rose vertically under the lift of flashing helicopters.

The air was alive and vibrant with directed streams of stubby-winged shapes that drove swiftly on their way, with only a wisp of vapor from their funnel-shaped sterns to mark the continuous explosion that propelled them. Here and there were those that entered a shaft of pale-blue light that somehow outshone the sun. It marked an ascending area, and there ships canted swiftly, swung their blunt noses upward, and vanished, to the upper levels.

A mile and more away, in a great shaft of green light from which all other craft kept clear, a tremendous shape was dropping. Her hull of silver was striped with a broad red band; her multiple helicopters were dazzling flashes in the sunlight. The countless dots that were portholes and the larger observation ports must have held numberless eager faces, for the Oriental Express served a cosmopolitan passenger list.

But Walter Harkness, standing at the window, stared out from troubled, frowning eyes that saw nothing of the kaleidoscopic scene. His back was turned to the group of people in the room, and he had no thought of wonders that were prosaic, nor of passengers, eager or blase; his thoughts were only of freight and of the acres of flat roofs far in the distance where alternate flashes of color marked the descending area for fast freighters of the air. And in his mind he could see what his eyes could not discern—the markings on those roofs that were enormous landing fields: Harkness Terminals, New York.

Only twenty-four, Walt Harkness—owner now of Harkness, Incorporated. Dark hair that curled slightly as it left his forehead; eyes that were taking on the intent, straightforward look that had been his father's and that went straight to the heart of a business proposal with disconcerting directness. But the lips were not set in the hard lines that had marked Harkness Senior; they could still curve into boyish pleasure to mark the enthusiasm that was his.

He was not typically the man of business in his dress.

His broad shoulders seemed slender in the loose blouse of blue silk; a narrow scarf of brilliant color was loosely tied; the close, full-length cream-colored trousers were supported by a belt of woven metal, while his shoes were of the coarse-mesh fabric that the latest mode demanded.

He turned now at the sound of Warrington's voice. E. B. Warrington, Counsellor at Law, was the name that glowed softly on the door of this spacious office, and Warrington's gray head was nodding as he dated and indexed a document.

"June twentieth, nineteen seventy-three," he repeated; "a lucky day for you, Walter. Inside of ten years this land will be worth double the fifty million you are paying—and it is worth more than that to you."

He turned and handed a document to a heavy-bodied man across from him. "Here is your copy, Herr Schwartzmann," he said. The man pocketed the paper with a smile of satisfaction thinly concealed on his dark face.

Harkness did not reply. He found little pleasure in the look on Schwartzmann's face, and his glance passed on to a fourth man who sat quietly at one side of the room.

Young, his tanned face made bronze by contrast with his close-curling blond hair, there was no need of the emblem on his blouse to mark him as of the flying service. Beside the spread wings was the triple star of a master pilot of the world; it carried Chet Bullard past all earth's air patrols and gave him the freedom of every level.

Beside him a girl was seated. She rose quickly now and came toward Harkness with outstretched hand. And Harkness found time in the instant of her coming to admire her grace of movement, and the carriage that was almost stately.

The mannish attire of a woman of business seemed almost a discordant note; he did not realize that the hard simplicity of her costume had been saved by the soft warmth of its color, and by an indefinable, flowing line in the jacket above the rippling folds of an

undergarment that gathered smoothly at her knees. He knew only that she made a lovely picture, surprisingly appealing, and that her smile was a compensation for the less pleasing visage of her companion, Schwartzmann.

"Mademoiselle Vernier," Herr Schwartzmann had introduced her when they came. And he had used her given name as he added: "Mademoiselle Diane is somewhat interested in our projects."

She was echoing Warrington's words as she took Harkness' hand in a friendly grasp. "I hope, indeed, that it is the lucky day for you, Monsieur. Our modern transportation—it is so marvelous, and I know so little of it. But I am learning. I shall think of you as developing your so-splendid properties wonderfully."

Only when she and Schwartzmann were gone did Harkness answer his counsellor's remark. The steady Harkness eyes were again wrinkled about with puckering lines; the shoulders seemed not so square as usual.

"Lucky?" he said. "I hope you're right. You were Father's attorney for twenty years—your judgment ought to be good; and mine is not entirely worthless.

"Yes, it is a good deal we have made—of course it is!—it bears every analysis. We need that land if we are to expand as we must, and the banks will carry me for the twenty million I can't swing. But, confound it, Warrington, I've had a hunch—and I've gone against it. Schwartzmann has tied me up for ready cash, and he represents the biggest competitors we have. They're planning something—but we need the land.... Oh, well, I've signed up; the property is mine; but...."

The counsellor laughed. "You need a change," he said; "I never knew you to worry before. Why don't you jump on the China Mail this afternoon; it connects with a good line out of Shanghai. You can be tramping around the Himalayas to-morrow. A day or two there will fix you up."

"Too busy," said Harkness. "Our experimental ship is about ready, so I'll go and play with that. We'll be shooting at the moon one of these days."

"The moon!" the other snorted. "Crazy dreams! McInness tried it, and you know what happened. He came back out of control—couldn't check his speed against the repelling area—shot through and stripped his helicopters off against the heavy air. And that other fellow, Haldgren—"

"Yes," said Harkness quietly, "Haldgren—he didn't fall back. He went on into space."

"Impossible!" the counsellor objected. "He must have fallen unobserved. No, no, Walter; be reasonable. I do not claim to know much about those things—I leave them to the Stratosphere Control Board—but I do know this much: that the lifting effect above the repelling area—what used to be known as the heaviside layer—counteracts gravity's pull. That's why our ships fly as they please when they have shot themselves through. But they have to fly close to it; its force is dissipated in another ten thousand feet, and the old earth's pull is still at work. It can't be done, my boy; the vast reaches of space—"

"Are the next to be conquered," Harkness broke in.

"And Chet and I intend to be in on it." He glanced toward the young flyer, and they exchanged a quiet smile.

"Remember how my father was laughed at when he dared to vision the commerce of to-day? Crazy dreams, Warrington? That's what they said when Dad built the first unit of our plant, the landing stages for the big freighters, the docks for ocean ships while they lasted, the berths for the big submarines that he knew were coming. They jeered at him then. 'Harkness' Folly,' the first plant was called. And now—well you know what we are doing."

He laughed softly. "Leave us our crazy dreams, Warrington," he protested; "sometimes those dreams come true.... And I'll try to forget my hunch. We've bought the property; now we'll make it earn money for us. I'll forget it now, and work on my new ship. Chet and I are about ready for a try-out."

The flyer had risen to join him, and the two turned together to the door where a private lift gave access to the roof. They were halfway to it when the first

shock came to throw the two men on the floor.

The great framework of the Transportation Building was swaying wildly as they fell, and the groaning of its wrenched and straining members sounded through the echoing din as every movable object in the room came crashing down.

Dazed for the moment, Harkness lay prone, while his eyes saw the nitron illuminator, like a great chandelier, swing widely from the ceiling where it was placed. Its crushing weight started toward him, but a last swing shot it past to the desk of the counsellor.

Harkness got slowly to his feet. The flyer, too, was able to stand, though he felt tenderly of a bruised shoulder. But where Warrington had been was only the crumpled wreckage of a steeloid desk, the shattered bulk of the illuminator upon it, and, beneath, the mangled remains where flowing blood made a quick pool upon the polished floor.

Warrington was dead—no help could be rendered there—and Harkness was reaching for the door. The

shock had passed, and the building was quiet, but he shouted to the flyer and sprang into the lift.

"The air is the place for us," he said; "there may be more coming." He jammed over the control lever, and the little lift moved.

"What was it?" gasped Bullard, "earthquake?—explosion? Lord, what a smash!"

Harkness made no reply. He was stepping out upon the broad surface of the Transportation Building. He paid no attention to the hurrying figures about him, nor did he hear the loud shouting of the newscasting cone that was already bringing reports of the disaster. He had thought only for the speedy little ship that he used for his daily travel.

The golden cylinder was still safe in the grip of its hold-down clutch, and its stubby wings and gleaming sextuple-bladed helicopter were intact. Harkness sprang for the control-board.

He, too, wore an emblem: a silver circle that marked

him a pilot of the second class; he could take his ship around the world below the forty level, though at forty thousand and above he must give over control to the younger man.

The hiss of the releasing clutch came softly to him as the free-signal flashed, and he sank back with a great sigh of relief as the motors hummed and the blades above leaped into action. Then the stern blast roared, though its sound came faintly through the deadened walls, and he sent the little speedster for the pale blue light of an ascending area. Nor did he level off until the gauge before him said twenty thousand.

His first thought had been for their own safety in the air, but with it was a frantic desire to reach the great plant of the Harkness Terminals. What had happened there? Had there been any damage? Had they felt the shock? A few seconds in level twenty would tell him. He reached the place of alternate flashes where he could descend, and the little ship fell smoothly down.

Below him the great expanse of buildings took form, and they seemed safe and intact. His intention was to

land, till the slim hands of Chet Bullard thrust him roughly aside and reached for the controls.

It was Bullard's right—a master pilot could take control at any time—but Harkness stared in amazement as the other lifted the ship, then swung it out over the expanse of ocean beyond—stared until his own eyes followed those of Chet Bullard to see the wall of water that was sweeping toward the land.

Chet, he knew, had held them in a free-space level, where they could maneuver as they pleased, but he knew, too, that the pilot's hands were touching levers that swung them at a quite unlawful speed past other ships, and that swept them down in a great curve above the ocean's broad expanse.

Harkness did not at once grasp the meaning of the thing. There was the water, sparkling clear, and a monstrous wave that lifted itself up to mountainous heights. Behind it the ocean's blue became a sea of mud; and only when he glanced at their ground-speed detector did he sense that the watery mountain was hurling itself upon the shore with the swiftness of a

great super-liner.

There were the out-thrusting capes that made a safe harbor for the commerce that came on and beneath the waters to the Harkness Terminals; the wave built itself up to still greater heights as it came between them. They were riding above it by a thousand feet, and Walter Harkness, in sudden knowledge of what this meant, stared with straining eyes at the wild thing that raced with them underneath.

He must do something—anything!—to check the monster, to flatten out the onrushing mountain! The red bottom-plates of a submarine freighter came rolling up behind the surge to show how futile was the might of man. And the next moment marked the impact of the wall of water upon a widespread area of landing roofs, where giant letters stared mockingly at him to spell the words: Harkness Terminals, New York.

He saw the silent crumbling of great buildings; he glimpsed in one wild second the whirling helicopters on giant freighters that took the air too late; he saw

them vanish as the sea swept in and engulfed them. And then, after endless minutes, he knew that Chet had swung again above the site of his plant, and he saw the stumps of steel and twisted wreckage that remained....

The pilot hung the ship in air—a golden beetle, softly humming as it hovered above the desolate scene. Chet had switched on the steady buzz of the stationary-ship signal, and the wireless warning was swinging passing craft out and around their station. Within the quiet cabin a man stood to stare and stare, unspeaking, until his pilot laid a friendly hand upon the broad shoulders.

"You're cleaned," said Chet Bullard. "It's a washout! But you'll build it up again; they can't stop you—"

But the steady, appraising eyes of Walter Harkness had moved on and on to a rippling stretch of water where land had been before.

"Cleaned," he responded tonelessly; "and then some! And I could start again, but—" He paused to point to

the stretch of new sea, and his lips moved that he might laugh long and harshly. "But right there is all I own—that is, the land I bought this morning. It is gone, and I owe twenty million to the hardest-hearted bunch of creditors in the world. That foreign crowd, who've been planning to invade our territory here. You know what chance I'll have with them...."

The disaster was complete, and Walter Harkness was facing it—facing it with steady gray eyes and a mind that was casting a true balance of accounts. He was through, he told himself; his other holdings would be seized to pay for this waste of water that an hour before had been dry land; they would strip him of his last dollar. His lips curved into a sardonic smile.

"June twentieth, nineteen seventy-three," he repeated. "Poor old Warrington! He called this my lucky day!"

The pilot had respected the other man's need of silence, but his curiosity could not be longer restrained.

"What's back of it all?" he demanded. "What caused it? The shock was like no earthquake I've ever known. And this tidal wave—" He was reaching for a small switch. He turned a dial to the words: "News Service—General," and the instrument broke into hurried speech.

It told of earth shocks in many places—the whole world had felt it—some tremendous readjustment among the inner stresses of the earth—most serious on the Atlantic seaboard—the great Harkness Terminals destroyed—some older buildings in the business district shaken down—loss of life not yet computed....

"But what did it?" Chet Bullard was repeating in the cabin of their floating ship. "A tremendous shake-up like that!" Harkness silenced him with a quick gesture of his hand. Another voice had broken in to answer the pilot's question.

"The mystery is solved," said the new voice. "This is the Radio-News representative speaking from Calcutta. We are in communication with the Allied

Observatories on Mount Everest. At eleven P. M., World Standard Time, Professor Boyle observed a dark body in transit across the moon. According to Boyle, a non-luminous and non-reflecting asteroid has crashed into the earth's gravitational field. A dark moon has joined this celestial grouping, and is now swinging in an orbit about the earth. It is this that has disturbed the balance of internal stresses within the earth—"

"A dark moon!" Chet Bullard broke in, but again a movement from Harkness silenced his exclamations. Whatever of dull apathy had gripped young Harkness was gone. No thought now of the devastation below them that spelled his financial ruin. Some greater, more gripping idea had now possessed him. The instrument was still speaking:

"—Without light of its own, nor does it reflect the sun's light as does our own moon. This phenomenon, as yet, is unexplained. It is nearer than our own moon and smaller, but of tremendous density." Harkness nodded his head quickly at that, and his eyes were alive with an inner enthusiasm not yet expressed in

words. "It is believed that the worst is over. More minor shocks may follow, but the cause is known; the mystery is solved. Out from the velvet dark of space has come a small, new world to join us—"

The voice ceased. Walter Harkness had opened the switch.

"The mystery is solved," Chet Bullard repeated.

"Solved?" exclaimed the other from his place at the controls. "Man, it is only begun!" He depressed a lever, and a muffled roar marked their passage to a distant shaft of blue, where he turned the ship on end and shot like a giant shell for the higher air.

There was northbound travel at thirty-five, and northward Harkness would go, but he shot straight up. At forty thousand he motioned the master-pilot to take over the helm.

"Clear through," he ordered; "up into the liner lanes; then north for our own shop." Nor did he satisfy the curiosity in Chet Bullard's eyes by so much as a word

until some hours later when they floated down.

An icy waste was beneath them, where the sub-polar regions were wrapped in the mantle of their endless winter. Here ships never passed. Northward, toward the Pole, were liner lanes in the higher levels, but here was a deserted sector. And here Walter Harkness had elected to carry on his experiments.

A rise of land showed gaunt and black, and the pilot was guiding the ship in a long slant upon it. He landed softly beside a building in a sheltered, snow-filled valley.

Harkness shivered as he stepped from the warmth of their insulated cabin, and he fumbled with shaking fingers to touch the combination upon the locked door. It swung open, to close behind the men as they stood in the warm, brightly-lighted room.

Nitro illuminators were hung from the ceiling, their diffused brilliance shining down to reflect in sparkling curves and ribbons of light from a silvery shape. It stood upon the floor, a metal cylinder a hundred feet

in length, whose blunt ends showed dark openings of gaping ports. There were other open ports above and below and in regular spacing about the rounded sides. No helicopters swung their blades above; there were only the bulge of a conning tower and the heavy inset glasses of the lookouts. Nor were there wings of any kind. It might have been a projectile for some mammoth gun.

Harkness stood in silence before it, until he turned to smile at the still-wondering pilot.

"Chet," he said, "it's about finished and ready—just in time. We've built it, you and I; freighted in the parts ourselves and assembled every piece. We've even built the shop: lucky the big steeloid plates are so easily handled. And you and I are the only ones that know.

"Every ship in the air lanes of the world is driven by detonite—and we have evolved a super-detonite. We have proved that it will work. It will carry us beyond the pull of gravitation; it will give us the freedom of outer space. It is ours and ours alone."

"No," the other corrected slowly, "it is yours. You have paid the bills and you have paid me. Paid me well."

"I'm paying no more," Harkness told him. "I'm broke, right this minute. I haven't a dollar—and yet I say now that poor Warrington was right: this is my lucky day."

He laughed aloud at the bewilderment on the pilot's face.

"Chet," he said slowly, and his voice was pitched to a more serious tone, "out there is a new world, the Dark Moon. 'Tremendous density,' they said. That means it can hold an atmosphere of its own. It means new metals, new wealth. It means a new little world to explore, and it's out there waiting for us. Waiting for us; we will be the first. For here is the ship that will take us.

"It isn't mine, Chet; it's ours. And the adventure is ours; yours and mine, both. We only meant to go a few hundred miles at first, but here's something big. We may never come back—it's a long chance that we're taking—but you're in on it, if you want to go...."

He paused. The expression in the eyes of Chet Bullard, master-pilot of the world, was answer enough. But Chet amplified it with explosive words.

"Am I in on it?" he demanded. "Try to count me out—just try to do it! I was game for a trial flight out beyond. And now, with a real objective to shoot at—a new world—"

His words failed him. Walt Harkness knew that the hand the other extended was thrust forth blindly; he gripped at it hard, while he turned to look at the shining ship.

But his inner gaze passed far beyond the gleaming thing of metal, off into a realm of perpetual night. Out there a new world was waiting—a Dark Moon!—and there they might find.... But his imagination failed him there; he could only thrill with the adventure that the unknown held.

Chapter 2: Escape

Two days, while a cold sun peeped above an icy horizon! Two days of driving, eager work on the installation of massive motors—yet motors so light that one man could lift them—then Harkness prepared to leave.

"Wealth brings care when it comes," he told Chet, "but it leaves plenty of trouble behind it when it goes. I must get back to New York and throw what is left of my holdings to the wolves; they must be howling by this time to find out where I am. I'll drop back here in a week."

There were instruments to be installed, and Chet would look after that. He would test the motors where the continuous explosion of super-detonite would furnish the terrific force for their driving power. Then the exhaust from each port must be measured and thrusts equalized, where needed, by adjustment of great valves. All this Chet would finish. And then—a test flight. Harkness hoped to be back for the first try-out of the new ship.

"I'll be seeing you in a week," he repeated. "You'll be that long getting her tuned up."

But Chet Bullard grinned derisively. "Two days!" he replied. "You'll have to step some if you get in on the trial flight. But don't worry; I won't take off for the Dark Moon. I'll just go up and play around above the liner lanes and see how the old girl stunts."

Harkness nodded. "Watch for patrol ships," he warned. "There's no traffic directly over here—that's one reason why I chose this spot—but don't let anyone get too close. Our patents have not been applied for."

Harkness spent a day in New York. Then a night trip by Highline Express took him to London where he busied himself for some hours. Next, a fast passenger plane for Vienna.

In other days Walter Harkness would have chartered a private ship to cut off a few precious hours, but he was traveling more economically now. And the representatives of his foreign competitors were not

now coming to see him; he must go to them.

At the great terminal in Vienna a man approached him. "Herr Harkness?" he inquired, and saluted stiffly.

He was not in uniform. He was not of the Allied Patrol nor of any branch of the police force that encircled the world in its operations. Yet his military bearing was unmistakable. To Harkness it was reminiscent of old pictures of Prussian days—those curious pictures revived at times for the amusement of those who turned to their television sets for entertainment. He had to repress a smile as he followed where the other led him to a gray speedster in a distant corner of the open concourse.

He stepped within a luxurious cabin and would have gone on into the little control room, but his guide checked him. Harkness was mildly curious as to their course—Schwartzmann was to have seen him in Vienna—but the way to the instrument board was barred. Another precise salute, and he was motioned to the cabin at the rear.

"It is orders that I follow," he was told. And Walter Harkness complied.

"It could happen only here," he told himself. And he found himself exasperated by a people who were slow to conform to the customs of a world whose closely-knit commerce had obliterated the narrow nationalism of the past.

They landed in an open court surrounded by wide lawns. He glimpsed trees about them in the dusk, and looming before him was an old-time building of the chateau type set off in this private park. He would have followed his guide toward the entrance, but a flash of color checked him.

Like a streak of flame a ship shot in above them; hung poised near the one that had brought them and settled to rest beside it. A little red speedster, it made a splash of crimson against the green lawns beyond. And, "Nice flying," Harkness was telling himself.

The hold-down clamps had hardly gripped it when a figure sprang out from an opened door. A figure in

cool gray that took warmth and color from the ship behind—a figure of a girl, tall and slender and graceful as she came impulsively toward him.

"Monsieur Harkness!" she exclaimed. "But this is a surprise. I thought that Herr Schwartzmann was to see you in Vienna!" For a brief moment Harkness saw a flicker of puzzled wonderment in her eyes.

"And I am sorry," she went on, "—so very sorry for your misfortune. But we will be generous."

She withdrew her hand which Harkness was holding. He was still phrasing a conventional greeting as she flung him a gay laugh and a look from brown eyes that smiled encouragement. She was gone before he found words for reply.

Walter Harkness had been brought up in a world of business, and knew little of the subtle message of a woman's eyes. But he felt within him a warm response to the friendly companionship that the glance implied.

Within the chateau, in a dark-paneled room, Herr Schwartzmann was waiting. He motioned Harkness to a chair and resumed his complacent contemplation of a picture that was flowing across a screen. Color photography gave every changing shade. It was coming by wireless, as Harkness knew, and he realized that the sending instrument must be in a ship that cruised slowly above a scene of wreckage and desolation.

He recognized the ruins of his great plant; he saw the tiny figures of men, and he knew that the salvage company he had placed in charge was on the job. Beyond was a stretch of rippling water where the great wave had boiled over miles of land and had sucked it back to the ocean's depths. And he realized that the beginning of his conference was not auspicious.

After the warmth of the girl's greeting, this other was like a plunge into the Arctic chill of his northern retreat.

"I have listed every dollar's worth of property that I

own," he was saying an hour later, "and I have turned it over to a trustee who will protect your rights. What more do you want?"

"We have heard of some experimental work," said Herr Schwartzmann smoothly. "A new ship; some radical changes in design. We would like that also."

"Try and get it," Harkness invited.

The other passed that challenge by. "There is another alternative," he said. "My principals in France are unknown to you; perhaps, also, it is not known that they intend to extend their lines to New York and that they will erect great terminals to do the work that you have done.

"Your father was the pioneer; there is great value in the name of Harkness—the 'good-will' as you say in America. We would like to adopt that name, and carry on where you have left off. If you were to assign to us the worthless remains of your plant, and all right and title to the name of Harkness Terminals, it might be —" He paused deliberately while Harkness stiffened

in his chair. "It might be that we would require no further settlement. The balance of your fortune—and your ship—will be yours."

Harkness' gray eyes, for a moment, betrayed the smouldering rage that was his.

"Put it in plain words," he demanded. "You would bribe me to sell you something you cannot create for yourselves. The name of Harkness has stood for fair-dealing, for honor, for scrupulous observance of our clients' rights. My father established it on that basis and I have continued in the same way. And you?—well, it occurs to me that the Schwartzmann interests have had a different reputation. Now you would buy my father's name to use it as a cloak for your dirty work!"

He rose abruptly. "It is not for sale. Every dollar that I own will be used to settle my debt. There will be enough—"

Herr Schwartzmann refused to be insulted. His voice was unruffled as he interrupted young Harkness'

vehement statement.

"Perhaps you are right; perhaps not. Permit me to remind you that the value of your holdings may depreciate under certain influences that we are able to exert—also that you are in Austria, and that the laws of this country permit us to hold you imprisoned until the debt is paid. In the meantime we will find your ship and seize it, and whatever it has of value will be protected by patents in our name."

His unctuous voice became harsh. "Honor! Fair dealing!" He spat out the words in sudden hate. "You Americans who will not realize that business is business!"

Harkness was standing, drawn unconsciously to his full height. He looked down upon the other man. All anger had gone from his face; he seemed only appraising the individual before him.

"The trouble with you people," he said, "is that you are living in the past—way back about nineteen fourteen, when might made right—sometimes."

He continued to look squarely into the other's eyes, but his lips set firmly, and his voice was hard and decisive.

"But," he continued, "I am not here to educate you, nor to deal with you. Any further negotiations will be through my counsellors. And now I will trouble you to return me to the city. We are through with this."

Herr Schwartzmann's heavy face drew into lines of sardonic humor. "Not quite through," he said; "and you are not returning to the city." He drew a paper from his desk.

"I anticipated some such verdammt foolishness from you. You see this? It is a contract; a release, a transfer of all your interests in Harkness, Incorporated. It needs only your signature, and that will be supplied. No one will question it when we are done: the very ink in the stylus you carry will be duplicated. For the last time, I repeat my offer; I am patient with you. Sign this, and keep all else that you have. Refuse, and —"

"Yes?" Harkness inquired.

"And we will sign for you—a forgery that will never be detected. And as for you, your body will be found—a suicide! You will leave a letter: we will attend to all that. Herr Harkness will have found this misfortune unbearable.... We shall be very sad!" His heavy smile grew into derisive laughter.

"I am still patient, and kind," he added. "I give you twenty-four hours to think it over."

A touch of a button on his desk summoned the man who had brought Harkness there. "Herr Harkness is in your charge," were the instructions to the one who stood stiffly at attention. "He is not to leave this place. Is it understood?"

As he was ushered from the room, Walter Harkness also understood, and he knew that this was no idle threat. He had heard ugly rumors of Herr Schwartzmann and his methods. One man, he knew, had dared to oppose him—and that man had gone suddenly insane. A touch of a needle, it was

whispered....

There had been other rumors; Schwartzmann got what he wanted; his financial backing was enormous. And now he would bring his ruthless methods to America. But there he needed the Harkness standing, the reputation for probity—and Walter Harkness was grimly resolved that they should never buy it from him. But the problem must be faced, and the answer found, if answer there was, in twenty-four hours.

An amazing state of affairs in a modern world! He stood meditating upon his situation in a great, high-ceilinged room. A bed stood in a corner, and other furniture marked the room as belonging to an earlier time. Even mechanical weather-control was wanting; one must open the windows, Harkness found, to get cooling air.

He stood at the open window and saw storm clouds blowing up swiftly. They blotted the stars from the night sky; they swept black and ominous overhead, and seemed to touch the giant trees that whipped their branches in the wind. But he was thinking not at

all of the storm, and only of the fact that this room where he stood must be directly above the one where Schwartzmann was seated. Schwartzmann—who would put an end to his life as casually as he would bring down a squirrel from one of those trees!

And again he thought: "Twenty-four hours!... Why hours? Why not minutes?... Whatever must be done he must do now. And might made right: it was the only way to meet this unscrupulous foreign scoundrel."

A wind-tossed branch lashed at him. On the ground below he saw the man who had brought him, posting another as a guard. They glanced up at his window. There would be no escape there.

And yet the branch seemed beckoning. He caught it when again it whipped toward him, and, without any definite plan, he lashed it fast with a velvet cord from the window drapes.

But his thoughts came back to the room. He snatched suddenly at the covers of the bed. What were the

sheets?—fabric as old-fashioned as the room, or were they cellulex? The touch of the soft fabric reassured him: it was as soft as though woven of spider's web, and strong as fibres of steel.

It took all of his strength to rip it into strips, but it was a matter of minutes, only, until he had a rope that would bear his weight. The storm had broken; the black clouds let loose a deluge of water that drove in at the window. If only the window below was still open!

He found the middle of his rope, looped it over a post of the bed, and, with both strands in his grasp, let himself out and over the dripping sill.

Would the guard see him, or had he taken to shelter? Harkness did not pause to look. He left the branch tied fast. "A squirrel in a tree," he thought: the branch would mislead them. His feet found the window-sill one story below. He drew himself into the room and let loose of one strand of his rope as he entered.

Schwartzmann was gone. Harkness, with the bundle

of wet fabric in his hands, glanced quickly about. A door stood open—it was a closet—and the rain-drenched man was hidden there an instant later. But he stepped most carefully across the floor and touched his wet shoes only to the rugs where their print was lost. And he held himself breathlessly silent as he heard the volley of guttural curses that marked the return of Herr Schwartzmann some minutes later.

"Imbecile!" Schwartzmann shouted above the crash of the closing window. "Dumkopff! You have let him escape.

"Give me your pistol!" Harkness glimpsed the figure of his recent guard. "Get another for yourself—find him!—shoot him down! A little lead and detonite will end this foolishness!"

From his hiding place Harkness saw the bulky figure of Schwartzmann, who made as if to follow where the other man had gone. The pistol was in his hand. Walt Harkness knew all too well what that meant. The tiny grain of detonite in the end of each leaden ball was the same terrible explosive that drove their ships: it

would tear him to pieces. And he had to get this man.

He was tensed for a spring as Schwartzmann paused. From the wall beyond him a red light was flashing; a crystal flamed forth with the intense glare of a thousand fires. It checked the curses on the other's thick lips; it froze Harkness to a rigid statue in the darkness of his little room.

An emergency flash broadcast over the world! It meant that the News Service had been commandeered. This flashing signal was calling to the peoples of the earth!

What catastrophe did this herald? Had it to do with the Dark Moon? Not since the uprising of the Mole-men, those creatures who had spewed forth from the inner world, had the fiery crystal called!... It seemed to Harkness that Schwartzmann was hours in reaching the switch.... A voice came shouting into the room:

"By order of the Stratosphere Control Board," it commanded, "all traffic is forbidden above the forty

level. Liners take warning. Descend at once."

Over and over it repeated the command—an order whose authority could not be disregarded. In his inner vision Harkness saw the tumult in the skies, the swift dropping of huge liners and great carriers of fast freight, the scurrying of other craft to give clearance to these monsters whose terrific speed must be slowly checked. But why? What had happened? What could warrant such disruption of the traffic of the world? His tensed muscles were aching unheeded; his sense of feeling seemed lost, so intently was he waiting for some further word.

"Emergency news report," said another voice, and Harkness strained every faculty to hear. "Highline ships attacked by unknown foe. Three passenger carriers of the Northpolar Short Line reported crashed. Incomplete warnings from their commanders indicate they were attacked. Patrol ship has spotted one crash. They have landed beside it and are reporting....

"The report is in; it is almost beyond belief. They say

the liner is empty, that no human body, alive or dead, is in the ship. She was stripped of crew and passengers in the air.

"We await confirmation. Danger apparently centered over arctic regions, but traffic has been ordered from all upper levels—"

The voice that had been held rigidly to the usual calm clarity of an official announcer became suddenly high-pitched and vibrant. "Stand by!" it shouted. "An S. O. S. is coming in. We will put it through our amplifiers; give it to you direct!"

The newscaster crackled and hissed: they were waiving all technical niceties at R. N. Headquarters, Harkness knew. The next voice came clearly, though a trifle faint.

"Air Patrol! Help! Position eighty-two—fourteen north, ninety-three—twenty east—Superliner Number 87-G, flying at R. A. plus seven. We are attacked!—Air Patrol!—Air Patrol!—Eighty-two—fourteen north, ninety-three—twenty—"

The voice that was repeating the position was lost in a pandemonium of cries. Then—

"Monsters!" the voice was shouting. "They have seized the ship! They are tearing at our ports—" A hissing crash ended in silence....

"Tearing at our ports!" Harkness was filled with a blinding nausea as he sensed what had come with the crash. The opening ports—the out-rush of air released to the thin atmosphere of those upper levels! Earth pressure within the cabins of the ship; then in an instant—none! Every man, every woman and child on the giant craft, had died instantly!

The announcer had resumed, but above the sound was a guttural voice that shouted hoarsely in accents of dismay. "Eighty-seven-G!" Schwartzmann was exclaiming, "—Mein Gott! It iss our own ship, the Alaskan! Our crack flyer!"

Harkness heard him but an instant, for another thought was hammering at his brain. The position!—the ship's position!—it was almost above his

experimental plant! And Chet was there, and the ship.... What had Chet said? He would fly it in two days—and this was the second day! Chet had no radio-news; no instrument had been installed in the shop; they had depended upon the one in Harkness' own ship. And now—

Walt Harkness' clear understanding had brought a vision that was sickening, so plainly had he glimpsed the scene of terror in that distant cabin. And now he saw with equal clarity another picture. There was Chet, smiling, unafraid, proud of their joint accomplishment and of the gleaming metal shape that he was lifting carefully from its bed. He was floating it out to the open air; he was taking off, and up—up where some horror awaited.

"Monsters!" that thin voice had cried in a tone that was vibrant with terror. What could it be?—great ships out of space?—an invasion? Or beasts?... But Harkness' vision failed him there. He knew only that a fast ship was moored just outside. He had planned vaguely to seize it; he had needed it for his own escape; but he needed it a thousand times more

desperately now. Chet might have been delayed, and he must warn him.... The thoughts were flashing like hot sparks through his brain as he leaped.

He bore the heavier body of Schwartzmann to the floor. He rained smashing blows upon him with a furious frenzy that would not be curbed. The weapon with its deadly detonite bullet came toward him. In the same burst of fury he tore the weapon from the hand that held it; then sprang to his feet to stand wild-eyed and panting as he aimed the pistol at the cursing man and dragged him to his feet.

"The ship!" he said between heavy breaths, "—the ship! Take me to it! You will tell anyone we meet it is all right. One word of alarm, one wrong look, and I'll blow you to hell and make a break for it!"

The pistol under Harkness' silken jacket was pressed firmly into Schwartzmann's side; it brought them safely past excited guards and out into the storm; it held steady until the men had fought their way through blasts of rain to the side of the anchored ship. Not till then did Schwartzmann speak.

"Wait," he said. "Are you crazy, Harkness? You can never take off; the trees are close; a straight ascent is needed. And the wind—!"

He struggled in the other's grasp as Harkness swung open the cabin door, his fear of what seemed a certain death overmastering his fear of the weapon. He was shouting for help as Harkness threw him roughly aside and leaped into the ship.

Outside Harkness saw running figures as he threw on the motors. A pistol's flash came sharply through the storm and dark. A window in the chateau flashed into brilliance to frame the figure of a girl. Tall and slender, she leaned forward with outstretched arms. She seemed calling to him.

Harkness seized the controls, and knew as he did so that Schwartzmann was right: he could never lift the ship in straight ascent. Before her whirling fans could raise her they would be crashed among the trees.

But there were two helicopters—dual lift, one forward and one aft. And Walt Harkness, pilot of the second

class, earned immediate disbarment or a much higher rating as he coolly fingered the controls. He cut the motor on the big fan at the stern, threw the forward one on full and set the blades for maximum lift, then released the hold-down grips that moored her.

The grips let go with a crashing of metal arms. The bow shot upward while a blast of wind tore at the stubby wings. The slim ship tried to stand erect. Another furious, beating wind lifted her bodily, as Harkness, clinging desperately within the narrow room, threw his full weight upon the lever that he held.

The full blast of a detonite motor, on even a small ship, is terrific, and the speedster of Herr Schwartzmann did not lack for power. Small wonder that the rules of the Board of Control prohibit the use of the stern blast under one thousand feet.

The roaring inferno from the stern must have torn the ground as if by a mammoth plow; the figures of men must have scattered like leaves in a gusty wind. The ship itself was racked and shuddering with the impact

of the battering thrust, but it rose like a rocket, though canted on one wing, and the crashing branches of wind-torn trees marked its passage on a long, curving slant that bent upward into the dark. Within the control room Walter Harkness grinned happily as he drew his bruised body from the place where he had been thrown, and brought the ship to an even keel.

Nice work! But there was other work ahead, and the smile of satisfaction soon passed. He held the nose up, and the wireless warning went out before as the wild climb kept on.

Forty thousand was passed; then fifty and more; a hundred thousand; and at length he was through the repelling area, that zone of mysterious force, above which was a magnetic repulsion nearly neutralizing gravity. He could fly level now; every unit of force could be used for forward flight to hurl him onward faster and faster into the night.

Harkness was flying where his license was void; he was flying, too, where all aircraft were banned. But

the rules of the Board of Control meant nothing to him this night. Nor did the voluble and sulphurous orders to halt that a patrol-ship flashed north. The patrol-ship was on station; she was lost far astern before she could gather speed for pursuit.

Walter Harkness had caught his position upon a small chart. It was a sphere, and he led a thin wire from the point that was Vienna to a dot that he marked on the sub-polar waste. He dropped a slender pointer upon the wire and engaged its grooved tip, and then the flying was out of his hands. The instrument before him, with its light bulbs and swift moving discs, would count their speed of passage; it would hold the ship steadily upon an unerring course and allow for drift of winds. The great-circle course was simple; the point he marked was drawing them as if it had been a magnet—drawing them as it drew the eyes of Walt Harkness, staring strainingly ahead as if to span the thousands of miles of dark.

Chapter 3: The Space Terror

The control room was glassed in on all sides. The thick triple lenses were free from clouding, and the glasses between them kept out the biting cold of the heights. The glass was strong, to hold the pressure of one atmosphere that was maintained within the ship. The lookouts gave free vision in all directions except directly below the hull, and a series of mirrors corrected this defect.

But Walt Harkness had eyes solely for the black void ahead. Only the brilliant stars shone now in the mantle of velvety night. No flashing lights denoted the passing of liners, for they were safe in the harbor of the lower levels. He moved the controls once to avoid the green glare of an ascending area, then he knew that there were no ships to fear, and let the automatic control put him back on his course.

Before him, under a hooded light, was a heavy lens. It showed in magnification a portion of the globe. There were countries and seas on a vari-colored map, and one pin-point of brilliance that marked his ever-

changing position.

He watched the slow movement of the glowing point. The Central Federated States of Europe were behind him; the point was tracing a course over the vast reaches of the patchwork map that meant the many democracies of Russia. This cruiser of Schwartzmann's was doing five hundred miles an hour—and the watching man cursed under his breath at the slow progress of the tiny light.

But the light moved, and the slow hours passed, while Harkness tried to find consolation in surmises he told himself must be true.

Chet had been delayed, he insisted to himself; Chet could never have finished the work in two days; he had been bluffing good-naturedly when he threatened to fly the ship alone....

The Arctic Ocean was beneath. The tiny light had passed clear of the land on the moving chart.

He would be there soon.... Of course Chet had been

fooling; he was always ready for a joke.... Great fellow, Chet! They had taken their training together, and Chet had gone on to win a master-pilot's rating, the highest to be had....

Another hour, and a rising hum from a buzzer beside him gave warning of approach to the destination he had fixed. The automatic control was warning him to decelerate. Harkness well knew what was expected of the pilot when that humming sounded; yet, with total disregard for the safety of his helicopters, he dived at full speed for the denser air beneath.

He felt the weight that came suddenly upon him as he drove through and beneath the repelling area, and he flattened out and checked his terrific speed when the gauges quivered at forty thousand.

Then down and still down in a long, slanting dive, till a landmark was found. He was off his course a bit, but it was a matter of minutes until he circled, checked his wild flight, and sank slowly beneath the lift of the dual fans to set the ship down as softly as a snowflake beside a building that was dark and forbiddingly

silent—a lonely outpost in a lonely waste.

No answer came to his hail. The building was empty; the ship was gone. And Chet! Chet Bullard!...

Harkness' head was heavy on his shoulders; his feet took him with hopeless, lagging steps to his waiting ship. He was tired—and the long strain of the flight had been in vain. He was suddenly certain of disaster. And Chet—Chet was up there at some hitherto untouched height, battling with—what?

He broke into a stumbling run and drew himself within the little ship. He was helpless; the ship was unarmed, even if the weapons of his world were of use against this unknown terror; but he knew that he was going up. He would find Chet if he could get within reach of his ship; he would warn him.... He tried to tell himself that he might yet be in time.

The little cruiser rose slowly under the lift of the fans; then he opened the throttle and swept out in a parabolic curve that ended in a vertical line. Straight up, the ship roared. It shot through a stratum of clouds. The sun that was under the horizon shone

redly now; it grew to a fiery ball; the earth contracted; the markings that were coastlines and mountains drew in upon themselves.

He passed the repelling area and felt the lift of its mysterious force—the "R. A. Effect" that permitted the high-level flying of the world. His speed increased. It would diminish again as the R. A. Effect grew less. Record flights had been made to another ten thousand.... He wondered what the ceiling would be for the ship beneath him. He would soon learn....

He set his broadcast call for the number of Chet's ship. They had been given an experimental license, and "E—L—29-X" the instrument was flashing, "E—L—29-X." Above the heaviside layer that had throttled the radio of earlier years, he knew that his call from so small an instrument as this would be carried for hundreds of miles.

He reached the limit of his climb and was suddenly weightless, floating aimlessly within the little room; the ship was falling, and he was falling with it. His speed of descent built up to appalling figures until his

helicopters found air to take their thrust.

And still no answering word from Chet. The cruiser was climbing again to the heights. The hands of Harkness, trembling slightly now, held her to a vertical climb, while his eyes crept back to the unlit plate where Chet's answering call should flash. But his own call would be a guide to Chet; the directional finders on the new ship would trace the position of his own craft if the new ship were afloat—if it were not lying crushed on the ice below, empty, like the liners, of any sign of life.

His despairing mind snapped sharply to attention. His startled jerk threw the ship widely from her course. A voice was speaking—Chet's voice! It was shouting in the little room!

"Go down, Walt," it told him. "For God's sake, go down! I'm right above you; I've been fighting them for an hour; but I'll make it!"

He heard the clash of levers thrown sharply over in that distant ship; his own hands were frozen to the

controls. His ship roared on in its upward course, the futile "E—L—29-X" of his broadcast call still going out to a man who could not remove his hands to send an answer, but who had managed to switch on his sending set into which he could shout.

Harkness was staring into the black void whence the wireless voice had come—staring into the empty night. And then he saw them.

The thin air was crystal clear; his gaze penetrated for miles. And far up in the heights, where his own ship could never reach and where no clouds could be, were diaphanous wraiths. Like streamers of cloud in long serpentine forms, they writhed and shot through space with lightning speed. They grew luminous as they moved living streamers of moonlit clouds.... A whirling cluster was gathered into a falling mass. Out of it in a sharp right turn shot a projectile, tiny and glistening against the velvet black. The swarm closed in again.... There were other lashing shapes that came diving down. They were coming toward him.

And, in his ears, a voice was imploring: "Down! down!

The R. A. tension may stop them!... Go down! I am coming—you can't help—I'll make it—they'll rip you to pieces—"

The wraith-like coils that had left the mass above had straightened to sharp spear-heads of speed. They were darting upon him, swelling to monstrous size in their descent. And Walt Harkness saw in an instant the folly of delay: he was not helping Chet, but only hindering.... His ship swung end for end under his clutching hands, and the thrust of his stern exhaust was added to the pull of Earth to throw him into a downward flight that tore even the thin air into screaming fragments.

One glance through the lookouts behind him showed lashing serpent forms, translucent as pale fire; impossible beasts from space. His reason rejected them while his eyes told him the terrible truth. Despite the speed of his dive, they were gaining on him, coming up fast; one snout that ended in a cupped depression was plain. A mouth gaped beneath it; above was a row of discs that were eyes—eyes that shone more brightly than the luminous body behind—

eyes that froze the mind and muscles of the watching man in utter terror.

He forced himself to look ahead, away from the spectral shapes that pursued. They were close, yet he thrilled with the realization that he had helped Chet in some small degree: he had drawn off this group of attackers.

He felt the upthrust of the R. A. Effect; he felt, too, the pull of a body that had coiled about his ship. No intangible, vaporous thing, this. The glass of his control room was obscured by a clinging, glowing mass while still the little cruiser tore on.

Before his eyes the glowing windows went dark, and he felt the clutching thing stripped from the hull as the ship shot through the invisible area of repulsion. A scant hundred yards away a huge cylinder drove crashingly past. Its metal shone and glittered in the sun; he knew it for his own ship—his and Chet's. And what was within it? What of Chet? The loudspeaker was silent.

He eased the thundering craft that bore him into a slow-forming curve that did not end for fourscore miles before the wild flight was checked. He swung it back, to guide the ship with shaking hands where a range of mountains rose in icy blackness, and where a gleaming cylinder rested upon a bank of snow whose white expanse showed a figure that came staggering to meet him.

Some experiences and dangers that come to men must be talked over at once; thrills and excitement and narrow escapes must be told and compared. And then, at rare times, there are other happenings that strike too deeply for speech—terrors that rouse emotions beyond mere words.

It was so with Harkness and Chet. A gripping of hands; a perfunctory, "Good work, old man!"—and that was all. They housed the two ships, closing the great doors to keep out the arctic cold; and then Chet Bullard threw himself exhausted upon a cot, while he stared, still wordless, at the high roof overhead. But his hands that gripped and strained at whatever they touched told of the reaction to his wild flight.

Harkness was examining their ship, where shreds of filmy, fibrous material still clung, when Chet spoke.

"You knew they were there?" he asked, "—and you came up to warn me?"

"Sure," Harkness answered simply.

"Thanks," Chet told him with equal brevity.

Another silence. Then: "All right, tell me! What's the story?"

And Walt Harkness told him in brief sentences of the world-wide warning that had flashed, of the liners crashing to earth and their cabins empty of human life.

"They could do it," said Chet. "They could open the ports and ram those snaky heads inside to feed." He seemed to muse for a moment upon what might have come to him.

"My speed saved me," he told Harkness. "Man, how

that ship can travel! I shook them off a hundred times —outmaneuvered them when I could—but they came right back for more.

"How do they propel themselves?" he demanded.

"No one knows," Harkness told him. "That luminosity in action means something—some conversion of energy, electrical, perhaps, to carry them on lines of force of which we know nothing as yet. That's a guess—but they do it. You and I can swear to that."

Chet was pondering deeply. "High-level lanes are closed," he said, "and we are blockaded like the rest of the world. It looks as if our space flights were off. And the Dark Moon trip! We could have made it, too."

If there was a questioning note in those last remarks it was answered promptly.

"No!" said Harkness with explosive emphasis. "They won't stop me." He struck one clenched fist upon the gleaming hull beside him.

"This is all I've got. And I won't have this if that gang of Schwartzmann's gets its hands upon it. The best I could expect would be a long-drawn fight in the courts, and I can't afford it. I am going up. We've got something good here; we know it's good. And we'll prove it to the world by reaching the Dark Moon."

Another filmy, fibrous mass that had been torn from one of the monsters of the heights slid from above to make a splotch of colorless matter upon the floor.

Harkness stared at it. The firm line of his lips set more firmly still, but his eyes had another expression as he glanced at Chet. He would go alone if he must; no barricade of unearthly beasts could hold him from the great adventure. But Chet?—he must not lead Chet to his death.

"Of course," he said slowly, "you've had one run-in with the brutes." Again he paused. "We don't know where they come from, but my guess is from the Dark Moon. They may be too much for us.... If you don't feel like tackling them again—"

The figure of Chet Bullard sprang upright from the cot. His harsh voice told of the strain he had endured and his reaction from it.

"What are you trying to tell me?" he demanded. "Are you trying to leave me out?" Then at the look in the other's eyes he grinned sheepishly at his own outburst.

And Walter Harkness threw one arm across Chet's shoulder as he said; "I hoped you would feel that way about it. Now let's make some plans."

Provisions for one year! Even in concentrated form this made a prodigious supply. And, arms—pistols and rifles, with cases of cartridges whose every bullet was tipped with the deadly detonite—all this was brought from the nearest accessible points. They landed, though, in various cities, keeping Schwartzmann's ship as inconspicuous as possible, and made their purchases at different supply houses to avoid too-pointed questioning. For Harkness found that he and Bullard were marked men.

The newscaster in the Schwartzmann cabin brought the information. It brought, too, continued reports of the menace in the upper air. It told of patrol-ships sent down to destruction with no trace of commander or crew; and a cruiser of the International Peace Enforcement Service came back with a story of horror and helplessness.

Their armament was useless. No shells could be timed to match the swift flight of the incredible monsters, and impact charges failed to explode on contact; the filmy, fibrous masses offered little resistance to the shells that pierced them. Yet a wrecked after compartment and smashed port-lights and doors gave evidence of the strength of the brutes when their great sinuous bodies, lined with rows of suction discs, secured a hold.

"Speed!" was Chet Bullard's answer to this, when the newscaster ceased. "Speed!—until we find something better. I got clear of them when they caught me unprepared, but we can rip right through them now that we know what we're up against."

He had turned again to the packing of supplies, but Harkness was held by the sound of his own name.

Mr. Walter Harkness, late of New York, was very much in the day's news. When a young millionaire loses all his wealth beneath a tidal wave; when, further, he flies to Vienna and transfers all rights in the great firm of Harkness, Incorporated, to the Schwartzmann interests in part settlement of his obligations; and, still further, when he is driven to fury by his losses and attacks the great Herr Schwartzmann in a murderous frenzy, wounds him and escapes in Schwartzmann's own ship—that is an item that is worth broadcasting between announcements of greater importance.

It interested Harkness, beyond a doubt. He remembered the shot outside the cabin as he took off in his wild flight. Schwartzmann had been wounded, it seemed, and he was to be blamed for the assault. He smiled grimly as he heard the warrant for his arrest broadcast. Every patrol-ship would be on the watch. And there would be a dozen witnesses to swear to the truth of Schwartzmann's lie.

The plan seemed plain to him. He saw himself in custody; taken to Vienna. And then, at the best, months of waiting in the psychopathic ward of a great institution where the influence of Herr Schwartzmann would not be slight. And, meanwhile, Schwartzmann would have his ship. Clever! But not clever enough. He would fool them, he and Chet.

And then he recalled the girl, Mademoiselle Diane, a slim figure outlined in a lighted window of the old chateau. Was there hope there? he wondered. Had her clear, smiling eyes seen what occurred?

"Nonsense," he told himself. "She saw nothing in that storm. And, besides, she is one of their crowd—tarred with the same stick. Forget her."

But he knew, as he framed the unspoken words, that the advice was vain. He would never forget her. There was a picture in his mind that could not be blotted out—a picture of a tall, slender girl, trim and straight in her mannish attire, who came toward him from her little red speedster. She held out her hand impulsively, and her eyes were smiling as she said;

"We will be generous, Monsieur Harkness—"

"Generous!" His smile was bitter as he turned to help Chet in their final work.

Chapter 4: The Rescue in Space

Now often are the great things of life submerged beneath the trivial. The vast reaches of space that must be traversed; the unknown world that awaited them out there; its lands and seas and the life that was upon it: Walter Harkness was pondering all this deep within his mind. It must have been the same with Chet, yet few words of speculation were exchanged. Instead, the storage of supplies, a checking and rechecking of lists, additional careful testing of generators—such details absorbed them.

And the heavy, gray powder with its admixture of radium that transformed it to super-detonite—this must be carefully charged into the magazines of the generators. A thousand such responsibilities—and yet the moment finally came when all was done.

The midnight sun shone redly from a distant horizon. It cast strange lights across the icy waste. And it flashed back in crimson splendor from the gleaming hull that floated from the hangar and came to rest upon the snowy world.

The two men closed the great doors, and it was as if they were shutting themselves off from their last contact with the world. They stood for long moments, silent, in the utter silence of the frozen north.

Chet Bullard turned, and Harkness gripped his hand. He was suddenly aware of his thankfulness for the companionship of this tall, blond youngster. He tried to speak—but what words could express the tumult of emotions that arose within him? His throat was tight....

It was Chet who broke the tense silence; his happy grin flashed like sunshine across his lean face.

"You're right," he answered his companion's unspoken thoughts; "it's a great little old world we're leaving. I wonder what the new one will be like."

And Harkness smiled back. "Let's go!" he said, and turned toward the waiting ship.

The control room was lined with the instruments they had installed. A nitron illuminator flashed brilliantly

upon shining levers—emergency controls that they hoped they would not have to use. Harkness placed his hand upon a small metal ball as Chet reported all ports closed.

The ball hung free in space, supported by the magnetic attraction of the curved bars that made a cage about it. An adaptation of the electrol device that had appeared on the most modern ships, Harkness knew how to handle it. Each movement of the ball within its cage, where magnetic fields crossed and recrossed, would bring instant response. To lift the ball would be to lift the ship; a forward pressure would throw their stern exhaust into roaring life that would hurl them forward; a circular motion would roll them over and over. It was as if he held the ship itself within his hand.

Chet touched a button, and a white light flashed to confirm his report that all was clear. Harkness gently raised the metal ball.

Beneath them a soft thunder echoed from the field of snow, and came back faintly from icy peaks. The snow

and ice fell softly away as they rose.

A forward pressure upon the ball, and a louder roaring answered from the stern. A needle quivered and swung over on a dial as their speed increased. Beneath them was a blur of whirling white; ahead was an upthrust mountain range upon which they were driving. And Harkness thrilled with the sense of power that his fingers held as he gently raised the ball and nosed the ship upward in meteor-flight.

The floor beneath them swung with their change of pace. Without it, they would have been thrown against the wall at their backs. The clouds that had been above them lay dead ahead; the ship was pointing straight upward. It flashed silently into the banks of gray, through them, and out into clear air above. And always the quivering needle crept up to new marks of speed, while their altimeter marked off the passing levels.

They were through the repelling area when Harkness relinquished the controls to Chet. The metal ball hung unmoving; it would hold automatically to the direction

and speed that had been established. The hand of the master-pilot found it quickly. They were in dangerous territory now—a vast void under a ceiling of black, star-specked space. No writhing, darting wraith-forms caught the rays of the distant sun. Their way seemed clear.

Harkness' eyes were straining ahead, searching for serpent forms, when the small cone beside him hummed a warning that they were not alone. Another ship in this zone of danger?—it seemed incredible. But more incredible was the scream that rang shrilly from the cone. "Help! Oh, help me!" a feminine voice implored.

Harkness sprang for the instrument where the voice was calling. "We aren't the only fools up here," he exclaimed; "and that's a woman's voice, too!" He pressed a button, and a needle swung instantly to point the direction whence the radio waves were coming.

"Hard a-port!" he ordered. "Ten degrees, and hold her level. No—two points down."

But Chet's steady hand had anticipated the order. He had seen the direction-finder, and he swung the metal ball with a single motion that swept them in a curve that seemed crushing them to the floor.

The ship levelled off; the ball was thrust forward, and the thunder from the stern was deafening despite their insulated walls. The shuddering structure beneath them was hurled forward till the needle of the speed-indicator jammed tightly against its farthest pin. And ahead of them was no emptiness of space.

The air was alive with darting forms. Harkness saw them plainly now—great trailing streamers of speed that shot downward from the heights. The sun caught them in their flight to make iridescent rainbow hues that would have been beautiful but for the hideous heads, the sucker-discs that lined the bodies and the one great disc that cupped on the end of each thrusting snout.

And beneath those that fell from on high was a cluster of the same sinister, writhing shapes which clung to a speeding ship that rolled and swung vainly in an

effort to shake them off.

The coiling, slashing serpent-forms had fastened to the doomed ship. Their thrashing bodies streamed out behind it. They made a cluster of flashing color whose center point was a tiny airship, a speedster, a gay little craft. And her sides shone red as blood—red as they had shone on the grassy lawn of an old chateau near far-off Vienna.

"It's Diane!" Harkness was shouting. "Good Lord, Chet, it's Diane!"

This girl he had told himself he would forget. She was there in that ship, her hands were wrenching at the controls in a fight that was hopeless. He saw her so plainly—a pitiful, helpless figure, fighting vainly against this nightmare attack.

Only an instant of blurred wonderment at her presence up there—then a frenzy possessed him. He must save her! He leaped to the side of the crouching pilot, but his outstretched hands that clutched at the control stopped motionless in air.

Chet Bullard, master-pilot of the first rank, upon whose chest was the triple star that gave him authority to command all the air-levels of earth, was tense and crouching. His eyes were sighting along an instrument of his own devising as if he were aiming some super-gun of a great air cruiser.

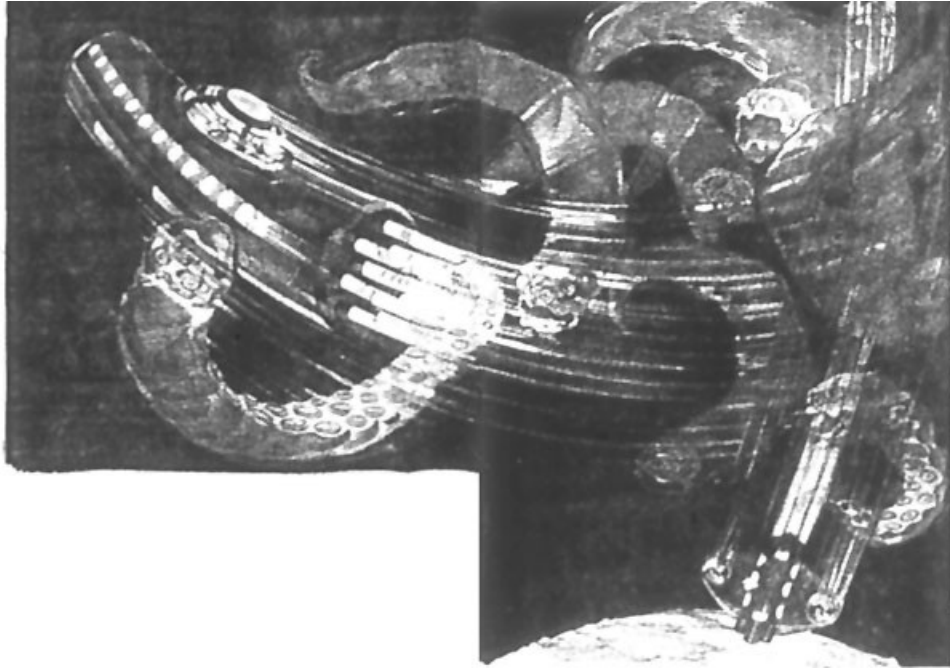
But he was riding the projectile itself and guiding it as he rode. He threw the ship like a giant shell in a screaming, sweeping arc upon the red craft that drove across their bow.

They were crashing upon it; the red speedster swelled instantly before their eyes. Harkness winced involuntarily from the crash that never came.

Chet must have missed it by inches, Harkness knew; but he knew, too, that the impact he felt was no shattering of metal upon metal. The heavy windows of the control room went black with the masses of fibrous flesh that crashed upon them; then cleared in an instant as the ship swept through.

Behind them a red ship was falling—falling free! And

vaporous masses, ripped to ribbons, were falling, too, while other wraith-like forms closed upon them in cannibalistic feasting.



Their terrific speed swept them on into space. When the pilot could check it, and turn, they found that the red ship was gone.

"After it!" Harkness was shouting. "She went down out of control, but they didn't get her. They've only sprung the door-ports a crack, releasing the internal pressure." He told himself this was true; he would not admit for an instant the possible truth of the vision

that flashed through his mind—a ripping of doors—a thrusting snout that writhed in where a girl stood fighting.

"Get it!" he ordered; "get it! I'll stand by for rescue."

He sprang for the switch that controlled the great rescue magnets. Not often were they used, but every ship must have them: it was so ordered by the Board of Control. And every ship had an inset of iron in its non-magnetic hull.

His hand was upon the switch in an agony of waiting. Outside were other beastly shapes, like no horror of earth, that came slantingly upon them, but even their speed was unequal to the chase of this new craft that left them far astern. Harkness saw the last ones vanish as Chet drove down through the repelling area. And he had eyes only for the first sight of the tiny ship that had fallen so helplessly.

Ahead and below them the sun marked a brilliant red dot. It was falling with terrific speed, and yet, so swift was their own pace, it took form too quickly: they

would overshoot the mark.... Harkness felt the ship shudder in slackening speed as the blast from the bow roared out.

They were turning; aiming down. The red shape passed from view where Harkness stood. His hand was tight upon the heavy switch.

Chet's voice came sharp and clear: "Rescue switch—ready?" He appeared as cool and steady as if he were commanding on an experimental test instead of making his first rescue in the air. And Harkness answered: "Ready."

A pause. To the waiting man it was an eternity of suspense. Then, "Contact!" Chet shouted, and Harkness' tense muscles threw the current into crashing life.

He felt the smash and jar as the two ships came together. He knew that the great magnets in their lower hull had gripped the plates on the top of the other ship. He was certain that the light fans of the smaller craft must have been crushed; but they had

the little red speedster in an unshakable grip; and they would land it gently. And then—then he would know!

The dreadful visions in his mind would not down.... Chet's voice broke in upon him.

"I can't maintain altitude," Chet was saying. "Our vertical blasts strike upon the other ship; they are almost neutralized." He pointed to a needle that was moving with slow certainty and deadly persistence across a graduated dial. It was their low-level altimeter, marking their fall. Harkness stared at it in stunned understanding.

"We can't hold on," the pilot was saying; "We'll crash sure as fate. But I'm darned if we'll ever let go!"

Harkness made no reply. He had dashed for an after-compartment to their storage place of tools, and returned with a blow-torch in his hand. He lit it and checked its blue flame to a needle of fire.

"Listen, Chet," he said, and the note of command in

his voice told who was in charge, at the final analysis, in this emergency. "I will be down below. You call out when we are down to twenty thousand: I can stand the thin air there. I will open the emergency slot in the lower hull."

"You're going down?" Chet asked. He glanced at the torch and nodded his understanding. "Going to cut your way through and—"

"I'll get her if she's there to get," Harkness told him grimly. "At five hundred, if I'm not back, pull the switch."

The pilot's reply came with equal emphasis. "Make it snappy," he said: "this collision instrument has picked up the signals of five patrol-ships a hundred miles to the south."

They dropped swiftly to the twenty level, and Harkness heard the deafening roar of their lower exhausts as he opened the slot in their ship's hull. He dropped to the red surface held close beneath, while the cold gripped him and the whirling blasts of air

tore at him. But the torch did its work, and he lowered himself into the cabin of the little craft that had been the plaything of Mademoiselle Diane.

The cabin was a splintered wreck, where a horrible head had smashed in search of food. One entrance port was torn open, and the head itself still hung where it had lodged. The mouth gaped flabbily open; above it was the suction cup that formed a snout; and above that, a row of staring, sightless eyes. Chet had slammed into the mass of serpents just in time, Harkness realized. Just in time, or just too late....

The door to the control room was sprung and jammed. He pried it open to see the unconscious body that lay huddled upon the floor. But he knew, with a wave of thankfulness that was suffocating, that the brute had not reached her; only the slow release of the air-pressure had rendered her unconscious. He was beside her in an instant.

He was dimly aware of the thunder of exhausts and the shrill scream of helicopters as he reached the upper surface of the red ship and forced his

unconscious burden into the emergency slot above his head.

"They're here!" Chet was shouting excitedly. "We're ordered to halt. Looks as if our flight was postponed." He tried to smile, but the experiment was a failure.

"I am dodging around to keep that big one from grabbing us with its magnet. Schwartzmann is aboard one of the patrols; they think the girl is in her ship. They won't fire on us as long as we hang on. But we'll crash if we do that, and they'll nail us if we let go."

Harkness had placed the girl's body upon the floor. His answer was a quick leap to the pilot's side. "See to her," he ordered; "I'll take the ship. Stop us now? Like hell they will! What's all our power for?"

One glance gave him the situation: the big gray fighter above, slipping down to seize them with her powerful magnets; four other patrol cruisers that slowly circled, their helicopters holding them even with the two ships that clung together in swift descent.

Chet was right; no burst of speed could save them from the guns of the patrols if they dropped the red speedster and made a break for it. They thought Diane was still in her ship, and a patrol would have the little craft safe before she had dropped a thousand feet. Their own stern exhaust would be torn by a detonite shell, and the big cruiser would seize them in the same way. No—they must hang onto the girl's ship and outmaneuver the others. He pressed the metal ball forward to the limit of its space, and the stern exhaust crashed into action with all the suddenness of his own resolve.

The ship beneath him threw itself straight ahead, flashed under the patrol-ship that blocked them, and was away. The weight below, and its resistance to the air, dragged them down, but Harkness brought the ball up, and the ship answered with a slow lift of the bow that aimed them straight out into space.

A vertical climb!—and the voice from the instrument beside him was shouting orders to halt. On each side were patrol-ships that roared upward with him.

"Cut those motors!" the voice commanded. "Release that ship! Halt, or we will fire!"

Harkness threw his ship into a wild spiral for reply, and the thin crack of guns came to him from outside. Down! A headlong dive! Then out and up again!

He was through the repelling area in a twisting, rocking flight. Not hit as yet; they had to aim carefully to avoid damaging the red craft.... He was straining his eyes for a glimpse of serpent-forms, and he laughed softly under his breath at thought of his strange allies. Laughed!—until he saw them coming.

He slammed down the switch on his own broadcast sender. "Back!" he shouted; "back, all of you! Look up! Look above you! The monsters are coming!—the air-beasts!—they are attacking!"

He threw his own ship into a dive; saw the others do likewise; then leaped for the switch on the rescue magnets and pulled it open.

He felt the red ship fall clear. He swung his own ship

free and aimed it out and up on a long line of speed. Beside him a voice from a distant, fleeing patrol was shouting; "Come back, you fool! Down! Down, through the R. A.!"

One backward glance showed him that his pursuers were safe. The serpents had turned to pursue him, and other writhing luminosities were falling from above. He swung head on, his motors wide open, his speed building up and up, to crash softly through the advance guard of the giant creatures out of space.

Nothing could stop him! He was trembling with the knowledge, and with the sheer joy of the adventure. Nothing could check them; neither cruisers nor monsters; nothing of earth or of space. They were free; they were on their way out—out where a new world awaited—where the Dark Moon raced on her unlighted path!

For the moment he had forgotten their passenger. The thrill of combat and the ecstasy of winning freedom for their great adventure had filled him to forgetfulness of all else.

"We're off!" he shouted. "Off for the Dark Moon!" Then he remembered, and turned where Chet was supporting the head of a slim girl whose eyes opened to look about, to glance from Chet to Harkness and back to Chet who was holding her.

"You saved me," she breathed, "from them!" She raised one hand weakly to cover her eyes at memory of those writhing shapes, then let it fall as other memories crowded in.

"The patrol-ships!" she exclaimed breathlessly. "You must...." Her voice trailed off into silence.

She was able to stand, and with Chet's help she came slowly to her feet as Harkness reached her. His voice was harsh and scornful; all elation had left him. He forced himself to hold his unsmiling gaze steadily upon the soft brown eyes that turned to his.

"Yes," he said; "we must 'surrender'—that was the word you wanted. We must surrender!... Well, Mam'selle Diane, we're not in a surrendering mood to-day. We've got away; made our escape!"

He laughed loudly and contemptuously, though he winced at the look of hurt that opened the brown eyes wide.

"You brought the patrol," he went on; "you learned where we were—"

"Herr Schwartzmann did," she interrupted in a quiet voice. "He located you; your signals were picked up.... They left two hours before I did," she added enigmatically. "I had to fly high, above the R. A. for greater speed."

Walt Harkness was bewildered. What did this mean? He tried to preserve the pose of hard indifference that was becoming increasingly difficult.

"More generosity?" he inquired. "You had to see the end of the hunt—be in at the death?"

"In at the death!" she echoed, and laughed in a tone that trembled and broke. "I nearly was, truly. But, no, my dear Monsieur Harkness: incredible as it seems, in view of your unfriendly reception, I came to warn

you!... But, enough of that. Tell me—you see how interested I am in your plans?—what did you say of the Dark Moon?"

Walter Harkness tried to rearrange his jumbled thoughts. She had come to warn them. Was this true? Or was this girl, who laughed so lightly, playing with him?

"Yes," he said dully, "we were bound for the Dark Moon. The Patrol couldn't stop us, nor the beasts that have paralyzed the flying service of the earth; but you have done it. We will turn back at once, and return you safely—"

He was again at the controls, one hand extended for the metal ball, when her slim hand closed upon his wrist.

"I know Herr Schwartzmann's plans," she said quietly. "He would ruin you; seize your ship; steal for himself the glory of your invention. Would you go back and deliver yourself into his hands—because of me?"

The brown eyes, Harkness found, were upon his with an expression he could not fathom.

"Yes," he said simply.

And still the eyes looked into his. There was laughter in them, and something else whose meaning was concealed.

"I ask you not to do this," she was saying. "You will succeed; I read it in your face. Let me go with you; let me share in the adventure. I am begging this of you. It is your turn to be generous."

Harkness' hand upon the metal ball held it motionless within its enclosing cage. From astern there came to him the muffled roar of a blast that drove them on and out into space—black, velvety space, thick-studded with sharp points of light.... He stared into that wondrous night, then back into the eyes that looked steadily, unfathomably, into his.... And his hand was unresisting as the strong, slender fingers about his wrist drew it back....

They were off for the Dark Moon: their journey, truly, was begun. And this girl, whom he had told himself to forget, was going with them. There was much that he did not understand, but he knew that he was glad with a gladness that transcended all previous thrills of the perilous plan.

Chapter 5: The "Dark Moon"

They were seated in the cabin of the man-made meteor that the brain of Harkness had conceived—two men and a girl. And they stared at one another unsmilingly, with eyes which reflected their comprehension of the risks that they ran and the dangers which lay ahead in the dark void. Yet the brown eyes of Mam'selle Diane, no less than the others, were afire with the thrill of adventure—the same response to the same lure that has carried men to each new exploration—or to their death.

Behind them, a rear lookout port framed a picture of awful majesty. The earth was a great disc, faintly luminous in a curtain of dead black. From beyond it, a hidden sun made glorious flame of the disc's entire rim. And, streaming toward it, a straight, blasting line from their stern exhaust, was an arrow of blue.

It had taken form slowly, that arrow of blue fire, and Harkness answered an unspoken question from the girl.

"Hydrogen and oxygen," he explained. "It is an explosive mixture at this height, but too thin to take fire. It will pass. Beyond this is pure hydrogen. And then, nothing."

He turned to switch on their radio receiver, and he set it for the newscasting waves that went forth from the most powerful station of Earth, the Press Tower of New York. A voice came to them faintly. For a time it vied with the muffled roar of their thundering exhaust; then it lost volume, faded, and was finally gone.

Their last contact with Earth was severed. There remained only blackness, and a great abyss through which they were plunging.

Harkness busied himself with calculations. He would have spoken, but the silence that followed the vanished voice of Earth had robbed his own voice of control.

A telescope sight was fixed rigid with the axis of their ship. He looked through it, moved their controls, and

brought the cross-hairs of his instrument to bear upon a star.

"That's about right," he said quietly. "I got all the information that the observatories had on the orbit of the Dark Moon. It is circling the Earth from north to south. It coincided for a short time with our own moon when it first hit; that's what kicked up the big wave and jarred us up. But it swung off and seems to have settled down in its own orbit now.

"Two hundred thousand miles away is what they make it, though I think that is more or less of a guess. I wish we could measure our speed." He looked at the earth-induction speed-indicator. Useless now, it registered zero.

"Well," he added, "we are shooting for the North Star. We will pass close to the Dark Moon's orbit; it should be about over the Pole on this date. And there is one good safe bet, anyhow; there is nothing between here and there to stop us."

He was being weakly facetious, but his efforts met

with an enthusiastic response. The tension of the moment, it was plain, had not affected Harkness alone. But it was many hours before the error of his statement was made manifest to all.

An island, faintly luminous, lay ahead. It grew to enormous size as they dashed upon it. Harkness sprang for the controls, but, before he could reach them, they had struck the vast field of pale green light, flashed through it, and left it diminishing in size behind them. Then, other lights, not brilliant, but like phosphorescent bodies, that came and went and flashed by with blinding speed.

Another luminous area rushed at them from ahead. At first it was a speck, then an island, and then a continent in size, and through it moved other brighter lights. This time a slight suggestion of an impact was felt. Here was matter of a form they could not guess. It was Chet who pointed to the glass of their control room. The heavy lights of the lookouts were smeared with sticky fluid that drew together in trickling streams.

"Nothing between us and the Dark Moon?" he asked of Harkness. "And space is an empty void? We Earth-creatures are a conceited lot."

"Meaning?" the girl questioned.

"Meaning that because we live on Earth—walk on solid ground, swim in the water and fly in the air—we deny the existence of life in space. There's the answer written in the blood of some life that was snuffed out as we hit it."

Harkness shook his head doubtfully. "Matter of some sort," he admitted, "and the serpents came from somewhere; but, as for the rest, the idea that the ocean of space is filled with life as our Earth-oceans are—creatures living and moving through unknown fields of force...." He did not finish the denial, but looked with wondering gaze at the myriad points that flashed softly into glowing masses and darted aside before their onward rush.

It was hours later that he checked their flight. Slowly at first he cut off the exhaust from their stern and

opened the bow valve. Slowly, for their wild speed must slacken as it had been built up, by slow degrees. The self-adjusting floor swung forward and up. Their deceleration was like the pull of gravity, and now straight ahead seemed down.

More hours, and they were at rest, floating in an ethereal ocean, an ocean teeming with strange life. Each face was pressed close to a lookout port. No one of the three could speak; each was too absorbed in the story his eyes were reading—this story of a strange, new existence where no life should have been.

Animalculae. They came in swarms; cloud masses of them floated past; and swirls of phosphorescent fire marked the presence of larger creatures that moved among them. Large and small, each living creature was invisible until it moved; then came the greenish light, like phosphorescence and yet unlike.

Still Harkness could not force himself to believe the irrefutable evidence. What of astronomy? he asked himself. Why was this matter not visible through

telescopes? Why did it not make its presence known through interference? Through refraction of light?... And then he realized the incredible distance within the scope of his vision; he knew that this swarming life was actually more widely spaced; and the light of a brilliant star shone toward him through the center of a living mass to prove that here was matter that offered no resistance to the passage of light.

A void of nothingness was before his eyes. He saw its black emptiness change to pale green fire that swirled and fled before a large shape. The newcomer swept down like light itself. Softly green like the others, its rounded body was outlined in a huge circle of orange light. Like a cyclopean pod, it was open at one end, and that open end closed and opened and closed again as the creature gulped in uncounted millions of the tiny, luminous dots—every one, as Harkness now knew, a living thing.

Strange light whirled into life and vanished, each evidencing a battle where life took life in this ocean of the invisible living. A gasp from the girl brought Harkness quickly about.

"Another one!" she said breathlessly, and pointed where the blackness was looped with writhing fire. It came swiftly near to show the outline of the dread serpent form; the suction cups showed plainly.

Danger was in this thing, Harkness knew, but it passed them by before he could move. The further lookout showed two gleaming monsters locked together in deadly embrace. So swift was their whirling motion that details of form were lost: only a confusion of lashing tentacles that whipped and tore, and one glimpse of a savage maw that sheared the tentacles off. Then the serpent was upon them.

Harkness had seen one time a sight that was indelibly impressed upon his memory. A steeloid cable had broken under a terrific strain; the end of it had lashed out with a speed the eye could not follow, to wind itself around the superstructure of a submarine—and the men who were gathered there.

He thought of that now, saw again the bleeding mass that had been an instant before a group of humans, as the serpent seized its prey. The two combatants were

encircled in a living coil of light. Then, as motion ceased, the ethereal sea went dark except for pulsing suction cups that drew and strained at the bodies they held.

Harkness was groping for the controls—he saw too plainly their own helplessness when they were at rest—but the voice of Dianne checked him.

"That bright star went out," she said; and Harkness let his gaze follow where she pointed.

The stars that were distant suns shone in brilliant points of light; no atmosphere here to dim them or cause a flickering. A bright point vanished as she looked—another!—and he knew abruptly that he was seeing a circle of blackness that moved slowly between them and the stars.

"The Moon!" he shouted. "The Dark Moon!" And now his hand found the controls that threw their ship into thunderous life. It was approaching! He swung the metal ball to throw them ahead and to one side, and the roar from the stern told of the fast-growing speed

that was pressing them to the floor....

An hour of wild flight, and the circle was close upon them. Too faintly lighted to register in the telescopes of Earth, there was still enough of luminosity to mark it as a round disc of violet that grew dimly bluish-green around the edge.

It ceased to grow. Their ship, Harkness knew, was speeding beside it some hundreds of miles away. But they were within its gravitational pull, and were falling toward it. And he aimed his ship bow-on to make the forward blast a check upon their falling speed.

The circle broadened; became a sphere; and then they were plunging through clouds more tenuous than any vapors of Earth—thick layers of gas that reflected no rays from the distant sun.

Beside them a sinuous form showed where a serpent of space was trying to match their speed. Harkness saw it twisting convulsively in the stratum of gas; it was falling, lifeless, beside them as they sped on and

away. Here was something the beasts could not combat. He made a mental note of the fact, but his thoughts flashed again to what lay ahead.

Every eye was held close to the lookouts that faced forward. The three were breathless, wordless; the hand of Harkness that held the tiny ball was all that moved.

Ahead of them was their goal, the Dark Moon! And they were prepared for Stygian darkness and a land of perpetual night. The almost invisible gas-clouds thinned; there was a glow ahead that grew brilliant as they watched; and then, with a blinding suddenness that made them shield their eyes, there flashed before them a world of light.

Each line of shore was marked distinctly there; the blue and violet of rippling seas were blended with unreal hues; there were mountains upthrust and, on the horizon, a range of volcanic peaks that poured forth flashing eruptions half-blanketed by invisible gas.

"The Dark Moon!" gasped Harkness. He was spellbound with utter awe at the spectacle he beheld. This brilliant world a-gleam to its farthest horizon with golden, glorious sunlight, softly spread and diffused! This, this! was the Dark Moon!

He turned to share with the others the delirium of ecstatic wonder too overpowering to be borne alone—turned, to find his happiness shot through with a pang of regret. He saw Chet and Diane. They had been standing together at a wide forward lookout; and now she was holding one hand of the pilot to her breast in an embrace of passionate joy.

Unconscious, that gesture of delight at this climax of their perilous trip?—Harkness told himself that this was so. But he swung back to the helm of the ship. He glanced at instruments that again were registering; he saw the air-pressure indicator that told of oxygen and an atmosphere where men might live. He gauged his distance carefully, and prepared to land.

The moment of depression could not last, for there was too much here to fill brain and eyes. What would

they find? Was there life? His question was answered by an awkward body that flapped from beneath them on clumsy wings. He glimpsed a sinuous neck, a head that was all mouth and flabby pouch, and the mouth opened ludicrously in what was doubtless a cry of alarm.

Then land, that took form and detail; a mountain whose curled top was like a frozen wave of stone. In a valley below it trees were growing. They swayed in a wind, and their branches reached upward and flowed and waved like seaweed on the ocean's floor. Green—vivid, glowing green!—and reds and purples that might be flowers and fruit.

An open space in a little valley spread invitingly before him, and he laid the ship down there in a jungle of lush grasses—set it down as gently as if he were landing from a jaunt of a thousand miles instead of two hundred times that distance straight away from Earth.

The others were looking at him with glowing, excited eyes. In the cabin was silence. Harkness felt that he

must speak, must say something worthy of the moment—something to express in slight degree the upwelling emotion that filled them all, three adventurers about to set foot upon a virgin world....

The pause was long-drawn, until he ended it in a voice that had all the solemn importance of a head-steward's announcement on a liner of the high-level service. But the corners of his lips were twitching to a little smile.

"This," he announced, "is as far as we go. This is the end of our run."

The tension that had held them emotionally taut was ended. With outstretched hands Diane ran toward him, and her broken laugh betrayed the hysteria she was holding back.

"Congratulations!" she cried, and clung tightly to his hands. "Congratulations, M'sieu Walter—"

Her voice choked and she could not go on; but the eyes that were raised to his were luminous through

the tears that filled them.

From the cabin beyond came a clash of levers, where Chet was preparing to open a port. And Harkness followed with unseeing eyes where the pilot waited that their commander might be the first to step forth upon an unknown globe—upon the surface of what men had called "The Dark Moon."

Chapter 6: Trapped

Walter Harkness, piloting his ship to a slow, safe landing on a new world, had watched his instruments with care. He had seen the outer pressure build up to that of the air of Earth; the spectro-analyzer had shown nitrogen preponderating, with sufficient oxygen to support life. And, below him, a monstrous thing that flopped hurriedly away on leather wings had told him that life was there.

But what would that life be? This was the question uppermost in the minds of all three as they stepped forth—the first of Earth's people to ask the question and to find the answer.

Chet had gone to their stores. He strapped a belt about his waist, a belt banded with a row of detonite cartridges, and a pistol hung at his hip. He handed another to Harkness. But the pistol he offered Diane was refused.

"My many accomplishments," she laughed, "do not include that. I never could shoot—and besides I will

not need to with both of you here." Her hand was resting confidently upon Chet's arm as they followed where Harkness led.

The heavy grass, standing waist-high in the little valley where their ship was at rest, stirred to ripples of vivid green as a light breeze touched it. Above, the sun shone warm upon this world of tropical growth. Harkness, listening in the utter silence for sounds that might mean danger, let his eyes follow up the rugged wall of rock that hemmed them in on two sides. It gleamed with metallic hues in the midday glare. He looked on to the sun above.

"A dark moon!" he said wonderingly. "Dark!—and yet it is blazing bright. Why can't we see it from Earth? Why is it dark?... I've an idea that the gas we came through is the answer. There is metal, we know, that conducts an electric current in only one direction: why not a gas that will do the same with light?"

The pilot was listening, but Diane seemed uninterested in scientific speculations. "The trees!" she breathed in rapture; "the marvelous, beautiful

trees!"

She was gazing toward distant towering growths where the valley widened. Like no trees of Earth, these monsters towered high in air, their black trunks branching to end in tendrils that raised high above them. And the tendrils were a waving, ever-moving sea of color, where rainbow iridescence was stabbed through with the flash of crimson buds. A down-draft of air brought a heady, intoxicating odor.

And still there was silence. To Walter Harkness, standing motionless and alert amidst the waving grass, it seemed a hush of waiting. A prickle of apprehension passed over his skin. He glanced about, his pistol ready in his hand, looked back for a moment at the ship, then smiled inwardly in self-derision of his fear as he strode forward.

"Let's have a look at things," he said with a heartiness not entirely sincere. "We'll discover nothing standing here."

But the silence weighed upon them all as they

pressed on. No exclamations of amazement from them now, no speculations of what might lie ahead. Only wide-eyed alertness and a constant listening, listening—until the silence was broken by a scream.

A man it seemed at first, when Harkness saw the figure leap outward from the cliff. A second one followed. They landed on all fours upon a rock that jutted outward toward the trees.

The impact would have killed a human, but these creatures stood upright to face the concealment from which they had sprung. One was covered with matted, brown hair. Its arms were long, and its fists pounded upon a barrel-like chest, while it growled hoarsely. The other ape-thing, naked and hairless, did the same. They were both uttering those sounds, that at times seemed almost like grunted words, when the end came.

A swishing of leather wings!—a swooping, darting rush of a huge body!—and one of the ape-men, as Harkness had mentally termed them, was struggling in the clutch of talons that gripped him fast.

The giant bat-shape that had seized him reached for the other, too. A talon ripped at the naked face, but the ape-man dodged and vanished among the rocks.

With pounding wings, the bat swept off in lumbering flight, but with its burden it seemed heavy, and failed to rise. The trees were close, and their waving tentacles drew back, then shot out to splash about the intruder. The talons released their hold, and the huge leather wings flapped frantically; but too late. Both captor and captive were wrapped in an embrace of iridescent arms and held struggling in mid-air, while the unmoving watchers below stood in horror before this drama of life and death.

Then a red bud opened. It was enormous, and its flowery beauty made more revolting the spectacle of the living food that was thrust within its maw.

The bud closed. Its petals were like lips.... And Diane, in white-faced horror, was clinging to the protecting arm of Chet Bullard beside her. Chet, too, had paled beneath his tan. But Walter Harkness, though white of face, was staring not at the crimson bud, shut tightly

about its living food, but upward toward the broken, rocky face of the cliff.

The flying thing, the unnamed horror of the air, had come silently from on high. None of them had seen it until it struck, and he was sure that the ape-men had been taken unaware. Then what had frightened them? What other horror had driven them in screaming terror to that fearful spring out into the open where they must have known danger awaited?

Did a rock move? he wondered. Was the splotch of color—that mottling of crimson and copper and gray—a part of the metallic mass? He rubbed his smarting eyes—and when he looked again the color was gone. But he had a conviction that eyes, sinister and deadly, had been staring into his, that a living mass had withdrawn softly into a shadowed cave, and that the menace that had threatened the ape-men was directed now toward them.

Was this the reason for the silence? Was this valley, so peaceful in its sunlit stillness, a place of death, from which all living things kept clear? Had the ape-men

been drawn there through curiosity at seeing their ship float down?

And the quiet beauty of the valley—it might be as horrible a mockery as the blazing splendor of those things ahead—those beautiful and horrible eaters of flesh! His voice was unsteady as he turned toward the others.

"Let's call this off," he said: "there is something up there. We'll go back to the ship and get up in the air again. We'll find a healthier place to land."

Like Harkness, Chet Bullard held his pistol ready in his hand. "Something else?" he inquired. "You saw something?" And Harkness nodded grimly.

They retraced their steps. A half-mile, perhaps. It had seemed long as they ventured forth, and was no shorter now. And the gleaming, silvery shape of the ship was entirely lovely to their eyes as they approached.

Harkness circled the blunt bow with its open exhaust

high above his head. On the far side was the port where they had emerged; its open door would be welcome in its promise of safe seclusion. His sigh of relief was echoed by the two who followed, for the horror and apprehension had been felt by all. But the breath choked abruptly in his throat.

Before them was the door, its thick metal wide-swung as they had left it. But the doorway itself, where warm darkness should have invited, was entirely sealed by a web of translucent stuff.

Harkness approached to look more closely. The substance was glistening and smooth—yellowish—almost transparent. It was made up of a tangle of woven cords which clung tightly to the metal sides. Harkness reached out in sudden fury to grip it and tear it loose. He grasped the slippery stuff, stumbled—and hung suspended by a tenacious hold that gripped his hand where it had touched, and would not let go.

His arm swung against it, and his shoulder. They were instantly immovable. And he knew in a single

terrifying instant his utter helplessness. He saw Chet Bullard's hands come up, and he found his voice in time to scream a harsh warning to him.

"Tear me loose!" he commanded, "but don't touch the damned stuff!" It took the combined strength of the pilot and the girl to free him, and Harkness had to set his teeth to restrain an exclamation of pain as his hand came slowly from the web that clung and clung and would not let go.

From his place upon the ground he saw Chet raise a broken piece of rock. It was like metal, and heavy, as the pilot's efforts proved, though it was surprisingly small in size. He saw Chet raise it above his head and crash it upon the thick web that filled the door. And, as his own aching arm had been held, the rock was seized in the tough strands, which gave back only slightly under the blow.

Harkness scrambled to his feet. The fury that had possessed him made the hurt of his arm unfelt. What devil's work was this that barred them from the safety of the ship? The memory of that other menace, half-

seen among the rocks, was strong upon him.

"Stand back!" he shouted to Chet and the girl, and he raised his pistol to send a charge of detonite into the unyielding mass. Here was power to tear the clinging-stuff to atoms.

He felt Chet's body plunge upon him an instant before he fired, and his pistol was knocked up and flew outward from his hand. He heard the pilot's voice.

"Walt!" Chet was saying. "For God's sake come out of it! Are you crazy? You might have wrecked that door-port so we never could have fixed it; or the bullet could have gone on through to explode inside the ship. Either way we would never get back: no leaky hull would ever let us make the trip home!"

Chet was right: Harkness knew it in a moment. He knew the folly of what he would have done, yet knew, too, that desperate measures were needed and needed quickly. The eyes of a devil had held his own from the darkness of the rocks, and the same rock wall came close to where they stood. He was in

command; it was up to him—

The moment of indecision ended as a mass of viscous fluid splashed heavily against the ship. Harkness whirled about to face the rocks. He was calm now and controlled, but under his quiet courage was a fear that gripped him. A fear of what he should find! But the reality was so far beyond any imagined terror as to leave him cold.

Above them and thirty feet away on a rocky ledge was a thing of horror. Basilisk eyes in a hairy head; gray, stringy hairs; and the fearful head ended in narrow, outthrust jaws, where more of the gray hairs hung like moss from lips that writhed and curled and sucked at the air with a whistling shrillness. Those jaws could crush a man to pulp. And the head seemed huge until the body behind it came into view.

The suddenness with which the great body rose showed the strength of the beast. A prodigious sack, like black leather, with markings of crimson and copper!—and the straggling, ropy hairs on it were greenish-gray like the lustre of the rocks at its back.

It stood upright on great hairy legs. The eyes shot forward on protruding antennae. The sack-like body flexed to bring the rear part under and forward. It was aiming at them.

Harkness seized the slim figure of the girl who stood, mute with horror, beside him. He threw her roughly to the ground, for the meaning of the viscous splash was plain.

"Down!" he shouted to Chet. "Down on the ground!" And he felt the swish of another liquid mass above his head as he obeyed his own command.

He felt for his pistol, then remembered it was gone—lost when Chet sprang upon him. But Chet had his.

"Shoot!" he ordered. "Shoot the damned thing, Chet! Kill the spider!"

Spider! He had named it unconsciously. But the name was inadequate, for here was a thing of horror beyond even a spider of prodigious size. This peaceful valley!—and here was its ruler, frightful, incredibly

loathsome!

He waited for the sound of a shot. A cursing, instead, was the only reply: Chet was not firing! Harkness whirled to see the pilot pinned by one arm to the web.

The fluid had caught him; he had not dropped quickly enough. And his right hand that had been raised, and the pistol it held, were clamped fast to the awful stuff.

There was no word of appeal, no call for help, yet Chet Bullard must have known what this meant. But neither did Harkness wait for that word. One spring, and he had the pilot by the waist, and he felt the weight of the girl's slim body added to his as her arms went about him to help. Chet's face went chalk-white as the hand tore loose. The pistol remained buried in the clinging stuff.

From the corner of his eye, Harkness saw the monster crouched to spring. He was half dragging the other two as he stooped and ran for the bow of the ship. The monstrous body thudded against the metal hull behind them.

The leap was prodigious. He saw the sack-like body fall inert, the great, hairy legs shaking. For the moment, the attacker was helpless: but the respite was brief, as the glaring eyes plainly told.

Below the ledge where the beast had been was an opening in the rocks—a bit of black shadow that was darker than the lustrous metal of the cliff. There was a chance—

"I can make it," Chet was saying, as Harkness dragged him on; "help Diane!" But the girl had sprung before them to gain a foothold and extend a helping hand. And they were back in the darkness of a rocky cave before the sunlit entrance was blocked by a hairy head and a horrible, slaverling mouth on a body too huge to enter.

Chapter 7: In the Labyrinth

Spent and shaken, the three passed onward into the cave. Harkness searched his pockets for his neolite flash; found it—a tiny pencil with a tip of glass—and the darkness of the inner cave was flooded with light.

A box of food tablets was in a pocket of Chet's jacket, and there was water that trickled in a tiny stream out of the rocks. It could have been worse, Diane pointed out with forced gaiety. But Harkness, who had gone back for a final look at the entrance to the cave, found it difficult to smile.

He had found the entrance an opening no longer: it was sealed with a giant web of ropy strands—a network, welded together to a glutinous mesh. They were sealed in as effectively as if the opening were closed by a thick door of steel.

They gathered fungus that grew in thready clumps on the walls, and this served as a mattress to soften the rocky floor that must be their bed. And Harkness sat silent in the darkness long after the others were

asleep—sat alone on guard, to think and to reach, at last, a conclusion.

A cleavage in the rocks made a narrow crack to the outside world, and through it the starlight filtered dimly. The thread of light grew brilliantly golden—moonlight, a hundredfold more bright than moonlight on Earth. And he realized that the source of light was their own globe, Earth, shining far through space!

It lighted the cave with a mellow glow. It shone upon the closed eyes of the sleeping girl, and touched lightly upon the rounded softness of a lovely face beneath a tangle of brown curls. Harkness stared long and soberly at the picture she made, and he thought of many things.

No parasite upon society was this girl. He had known such; but her ready wit, her keen grasp of affairs, had been evident in their talks on the journey they had made. They had stamped her as one who was able to share in the work and responsibilities of a world where men and women worked together. Yet there was nothing of the hardness that so many women

showed. And now she was altogether feminine, and entirely lovely.

Not far away, Chet Bullard was sleeping heavily. His hand, injured painfully when they tore it from the clinging mass, had been bandaged by Diane. It troubled him now, and he flung one arm outward. His hand touched that of the girl, and Harkness saw the instant quiet that came upon him at the touch. And Diane—her lips were smiling in her sleep.

They had been much together, those two; theirs had been a ready, laughing comradeship. It had troubled Harkness, but now he put all thought of self aside.

"This trip," he thought, "can end only in disaster—if it has not already done so. What a fool I was to bring these two!" And: "If I want to risk my own life," he told himself bitterly, "that's my own affair. But for Chet, and Diane, with their lives ahead of them—" His determination was quickly reached.

He would go back. Somehow, some way, he would get them to the ship. They would return to Earth. And

then.... His plans were vague. But he knew he could interest capital; he knew that this new world, that was one great mine of raw metals, would not go long unworked. The metallic colorations in rock walls and mountains had fairly shouted of rich ores and untold wealth.

Yes, they would go back, but he would return. He would put from his mind all thought of this girl; he would forget forever those nebulous plans that had filled him with hope for a happiness beyond all hoping. And he would come back here prepared for conquest.

He put aside all speculation as to what other horrible forms of life the little world might hold: he would be prepared to deal with them. But he still wondered if there were people. He had hoped to find some human life.

And this hope, too, left him; his sense of this globe as an undeveloped world was strong upon him. The monsters; the tropical, terrible vegetation; the very air itself—all breathed of a world that was young.

There had not been time for the long periods of evolution through which humanity came.

He tried to tell himself of the wealth that would be his; tried to feel the excitement that should follow upon such plans. But he could only feel a sense of loss, of something precious that was gone. Diane—named for the moon: she seemed more precious now to the lonely man than all else on moon or Earth. She could never be his; she never had been. It was Chet upon whom the gods and Diane had smiled. And Chet deserved it.

Only in this last conviction did he find some measure of consolation during the long night.

"He will rip the big web out with detonite," Harkness told the others when morning came. "But I want to get the spider, too."

A touch upon the web with a stick brought an instant response. Again they saw in all its repulsiveness the thing that seemed a creature of some horrible dream. The eyes glared, while hairy feelers seized the web

and shook it in furious rage. Harkness, fearing another discharge of the nauseating, viscous liquid, withdrew with the others far back in the cave.

"Wait," he told them. "I have a plan."

The creature vanished, and Harkness went cautiously forward to the web. He took a detonite cartridge from his belt and placed it on the floor close to the ropy strands. Another, and another, until he had a close-packed circle of the deadly things. Then he placed a heavy, metallic piece of rock beside them and proceeded, with infinite care, to build a tower.

One irregular block upon another: it was like a child at play with his toys. Only now the play was filled with deadly menace. The stones swayed, then held in precarious, leaning uncertainty; the topmost was directly above the cartridges on the floor.

"Back!" he ordered the others, "and lie flat on the floor. I must guess at the amount of explosive for the job."

Chet and Diane were safe as Harkness weighed a fragment of metal in his hand. One throw—and he must not hit the tower he had built.... The rock struck into the network of cords; he saw it clinging where it struck, and saw the web shaking with the blow.

Over his shoulder, as he ran, he glimpsed the onrush of the beast. Again the eyes were glaring, again the feelers were shaking furiously at the web. They touched the leaning stones!

He had reached the place where Chet and Diane lay and saw the beginning of the tower's fall; and in the split second of its falling he threw himself across the body of the prostrate girl to shield her from flying fragments of stone. A blast of air tore at him; his ears were numbed with the thunder of the blast—a thunder that ended with a crashing of stone on stone....

Slowly he recovered his breath; then raised himself to his feet to look toward the entrance. It would be open now, the way cleared. But, instead of sunlight, he saw utter dark. Where the mouth of the cave had been

was blackness—and nothing else!

He fumbled for his flash, and stood in despairing silence before what the light disclosed.

The rock was black and shining about the mouth of the cavern. It had split like glass. In shattered fragments it filled the forward part of the cave. The whole roof must have fallen, and a crashing slide above had covered all.

Chet was beside him; Harkness dared not look toward the girl coming expectantly forward.

"We'll use more of the same," Chet suggested: "we will blast our way out."

"And bring down more rock with each charge," Harkness told him tonelessly. "This means we are—"

Diane had overheard. Harkness' pause had come too late.

"Yes?" she encouraged. "This means we are

entombed?—buried here? Is that it?"

Her voice was quiet; her eyes, in the light of the little flash, were steady in their look upon the man who was leader of the expedition. Diane Vernier might shudder with horror before some obscene beast—she would tremble with delight, too, at sight of some sudden beauty—but she was not one to give way to hysteria when a situation must be faced. No despair could be long-lived under the spell of those eyes, brave and encouraging.

"No," said Walter Harkness: "we will find some way to escape. This is blocked. We will follow the cave back and see where it leads. There must be other outlets. We're not quitting now." He smiled with a cheerful confidence that gave no hint of being assumed, and he led the way with a firm step.

Diane followed as usual, close to Chet. But her eyes were upon their leader; they would have repaid him for a backward look.

To a mineralogist this tunnel that nature had pierced

through the rock would have been an endless delight, but to a man seeking escape from his living tomb it brought no such ecstasy. The steady, appraising glance of Harkness was everywhere—darting ahead, examining the walls, seeking some indication, some familiar geological structure, that might be of help.

He stopped once to kick contemptuously at a vein of quartz. Three feet in thickness—and it crumbled to fragments under his foot to release a network of gold.

"Rotten with it," he said.

And the only comment came from Chet: "A fat lot of good it does us!" he replied.

The cavern branched and branched again; it opened to a great room higher than their light could reach; it narrowed to leave apertures through which they crawled like moles; it became a labyrinth of passages from which there seemed no escape. Each turn, each new opening, large or small—it was always the same: Harkness praying inaudibly for a glimpse of light that would mean day; and, instead—darkness!—and their

own pencil of light so feeble against the gloom
ahead....

Chapter 8: The Half-Men

The Valley of the Fires," Harkness was to call it later, and shorten it again to "Fire Valley." The misty smokes of a thousand fires rose skyward from the lava beds of its upper end.

Where the lava flow had stopped and the lower valley began, came vegetation. Sparse at first, then springing to luxuriant growth, it contrasted strongly with the barren wall beside it and the equally barren waste of high ground where the fires were.

Mountains hemmed it in; their distant peaks showed black, with red and green striations of mineralized deposits. The valleys about them were dense with foliage, a green so startling and vivid as almost to offend the eye.

Trees were in the lower end of the valley. They were of tremendous growth, and the dew of early morning dripped from them like rain. Trunks smooth and ghostly white, except where the bark had split into countless fractures and the scarlet color of the sap-

wood showed through. Outflung branches forked to drop down dangling stalks that rooted again in the ground; these made a forest of slender white supports for the leafy roof—a forest of spectral shapes in a shadow-world. Only here and there were arrows of sunlight that pierced the dense foliage above to strike through and down to the black earth floor and the carpet of rainbow hues.

And that carpet of radiant colors was trampled into paths that wound on to lose themselves in the half-light of that ghostly world.

From one of the paths came sounds of tramping feet. Cries and snarling grunts resounded through the silence to send lizards scurrying to the safety of the trees. Animal cries or hoarse voices of men—it would have been difficult to tell which. And a sight of the creatures themselves would have left an observer still in doubt.

A score of them, and they walked upright. Some bodies were naked, a coppery-black in color; on others the skin was covered by a sparse growth of

hair. Noses that were mere nostril-slits; low foreheads, retreating flatly to a tangle of matted hair; protruding jaws which showed the white flash of canine teeth as the ape-like faces twisted and the creatures tugged at ropes of vines thrown over their shoulders.

The Neanderthal Man had not learned to use the wheel; and these man-animals, too, used only the sheer strength of their corded muscles as they hauled at the body of a beast.

It dragged along the path behind them, rolling at times to show the white of its belly instead of the flexible armor-plating that protected its back. Fresh blood flowed from a wound in the white under-skin; this, and the dripping flints that tipped their spears, told how death had come. One curving horn that projected from a wrinkled snout caught at times in the undergrowth, and then the ones who dragged it would throw themselves upon the head with snarls of fury and twist the big horn free.

The rocky cliff was honeycombed with caves. A cry,

half-human in its tone, brought an avalanche of figures scurrying forth. Children, whose distended abdomens told of the alternate feasting and hunger that was theirs, were cuffed aside by women who shouted shrilly at sight of the prize. Older men came, too, and in a screaming mob they threw themselves upon the carcass of the beast that had been dragged into the open.

Flint knives came into play, then sharpened stakes that were thrust through the bleeding meat. Young and old seized what they could, leaped across the little stream that trickled downward through the valley, and raced for the nearest fires.

The fumaroles made places for roasting, and these half-men had learned the taste of cooked meats. Their jaws were salivating as they waited. The scents were tantalizing.

A hunter was reaching to snatch a shred of half-cooked meat when a woman of the tribe gave a scream that was shrill with fear. She pointed her gnarled hand upward on the face of the cliff.

An opening was there, a black cave-mouth in the black cliff. Above their own caves, was this higher opening, yet they must have explored it often—must have followed it as far as they dared, where it led to the mountain's innermost depths. Yet from this familiar place there stepped forth an apparition. Another followed, and another—three strange creatures like none the savage eyes of this world had ever seen.

Clothing torn to rags—faces black and smeared with blood—hands that reached groping and trembling toward the light, until the half-blinded eyes of one saw the trickling brook.

Then, "Water!" he croaked in a voice hardly more human than the grunts of horror from below, and he took the hand of another to help in the steep descent—while the tribe beneath them forgot their anticipated feast, forgot all but their primordial fear of the unknown, and, with startled cries, broke and ran for the safety of the forest....

Chapter 9: The Throwers of Thunder

It is doubtful if Walter Harkness heard or consciously saw that fleeing tribe. He saw only the glorious sunlight and its sparkling reflection upon the stream; and in his nostrils was the scent of roasting meat to rouse him to a frenzy.

For seven Earth days he and Chet had kept account of the hours. How long after that they had followed their stumbling course he could not have told. Time ceased to be measured in hours and days; rather was it reckoned in painful progress a foot at a time up rocky burrows, helping, both of them, to ease the path for the girl who struggled so bravely with them, until aching muscles refused to bear them further. Then periods of drugged sleep with utter fatigue for an opiate—and on again in hopeless, aimless wandering.

And now, the sun! And he was plunging his head into icy water to drink until he strangled for breath! He knew that Chet and Diane were beside him. A weak laugh came to his lips as he sat erect: the girl had drunk as deeply as the rest—and now she was

washing her hands and face.

The idea seemed tremendously amusing—or was it that the simple rite indicated more than he could bear to know? It meant that they were safe; they had escaped; and again a trifle like cleanliness was important in a woman's eyes. He rocked with meaningless laughter—until again a puff of wind brought distinctly the odor of cooking food.

A hundred feet away, up higher in the valley, were the first of the fires. Harkness came to his feet and ran—ran staggeringly, it is true, but he ran—and he tore at some hanging shreds of smoking meat regardless of the burn. But the fierce gnawing at his stomach did not force him to wolf the food. He carried it back, a double handful of half-cooked meat, to the others. And he doled it out sparingly to them and to himself.

The cold water had restored his sanity. "Easy," he advised them; "too much at first and we're done for."

He was chewing on the last shred when a thought struck him; he had been too stunned before to reason.

For the first time he jerked up his head in startled alarm. He looked carefully about—at the meat on its pointed stakes, at the distant fires, at the open glade below them and the dense jungle beyond where nothing stirred.

"Cooked meat!" he exclaimed in a whisper. "Who did it? This means people!"

The memory that had registered only in some corner of a mind deeper than the conscious, came to the surface. "I remember," he said. "There were things that ran—men—apes—what were they?"

"Oh, Lord!" Chet groaned. "And all I ask is to be left alone!" But he wearily raised himself upright and verified the other's words.

"They ran toward that opening among those trees. And I'll bet they live in these caves up here behind us. I got a whiff of them as we came past: they smelled like a zoo."

They had come out on top of the lava-flow, close to its

end. The molten rock had hardened to leave a drop of some forty feet to the open glade below. Beyond that the jungle began, but behind them was the lava bed, frozen in countless corrugations. Harkness rose and helped Diane to her feet: they must force their aching muscles to take up their task again.

He peered up the valley where a thousand fires smoked. "That stream," he said, "comes in from a little valley that branches off up there. We had better follow it—and we had better get going before that gang recovers from its surprise."

They were passing the first of the fires where the meat was smoking when Chet called a halt. "Wait a bit," he begged: "let's take a sirloin steak along—" He was haggling at a chunk of meat with a broken flint when a spear whistled in and crashed upon the rocks.

Harkness saw the thrower. Beyond the lava's edge the jungle could be seen, and from among the spectral trees had darted a wild figure whose hairy arm had snapped the spear into the air.

There were more who followed. They were sliding down the slender trunks that supported the branches and leafy roof high above the ground. To Harkness the open doorway to the jungle seemed swarming with monkey-men. The movement of the three fugitives had been taken as a retreat, and the courage of the cave-dwellers had returned.

Harkness glanced quickly about to size up their situation. To go on was certain death; if these creatures came up to meet them on the lava-beds, the end was sure. The escarpment gave the three some slight advantage of a higher position.

One vain wish for the pistol now resting in the deep grass beside a vanished ship; then he sprang for the weapon that had been thrown—it was better than nothing—and advanced cautiously to the lava's edge.

No concealment there; no broken rocks, other than pieces of flint; a poor fortress, this, that they must defend! And the weapons of their civilization were denied them.

Another spear hummed its shrill song, coming dangerously close. He saw women-figures that came from the jungle with supplies of weapons. Short spears, about six feet long, like the one he held. But they had others, too—long lances of slender wood with tips of flint. Thrusting spears! He had a sickening vision of those jagged stone heads ripping into their bodies while these beasts stood off in safety. It was thus that they killed their prey. And Diane—he could not even spare her—could not give her the kind oblivion of a mercy-shot!

The other two were lying beside him now at the edge of the sloping cliff. The bank of shining gray was not steep; the enemy would climb it with ease. Hopeless! They had won through for this!... Harkness groaned silently in an agony of spirit at thought of the girl.

"Oh, for one detonite shell to land among them!" he said between clenched teeth—then was breathless with a thought that exploded within his mind.

His fingers were clumsy with haste as he fumbled at the head of the spear. The sharp-edged stone was

bound to its shaft with sinew, wound round and round. The enemy were out in the open; he spared an instant's look to see them advancing. A clattering of falling spears sounded beyond, but the weapons were overcast, thanks to the protection of the rocky edge.

"A shell!" Harkness spoke with sharp intensity. "Give me a cartridge from your belt, quick!"

Chet handed him one. Harkness took one look, then pulled a cartridge from his own belt.

"That explains it," he was muttering as he worked, "—the big explosion when I smashed the rocks. You've got ammunition for your pistol, but you put rifle cartridges in my belt—and service ammunition at that. No wonder they raised the devil with those rocks!"

His fingers were working swiftly now to bind the slender cartridge to the spear. A chipped out hollow in the flint made a seat. He gave silent thanks for Chet Bullard's mistake. Chet had slipped; he had filled Harkness' belt with ammunition that would have

been useless for the pistol—but it was just what he needed here.

So intent was he on his task that he hardly heard the yelling chorus from below. It swelled to a din; but his work was finished, and he looked up.

One figure in advance of the rest had been urging them on, and they came in a wild rush now. Walt Harkness scrambled to his feet. Tall and sinewy, his broad shoulders, scantily covered by the rags of blouse that remained, were turned sideways as he raised the spear. The yelling from below swelled louder and more shrill.

This strange one from another tribe—he was unarmed except for one of their own spears. The curious covering on his body was flapping in the breeze. Nothing here, surely, to hold a hunting-tribe in check.

The spear rose slowly in the air. What child of the tribe could not have thrown it better! They came on faster now; the leader had almost reached the place where the spear was dropping down. He must have

laughed, if laughter had yet been born in such a breast, at the futile weapon dropping point first among the rocks.

One little shell, a scant three inches long, no thicker than the stylus on milady's desk! But here was service ammunition, as Harkness had said; and in the end of the lead a fulminate cap was buried—and a grain of dense, gray dust!

Here was no flame—only a concussion that cracked upon one's ears, and flying rock fragments that filled the air with demoniac shrieks. And then that sound was lost in the shriller cries of terror and pain as the ape-men broke for the trees.

Harkness saw some of them who rose and fell again to rise no more, and one who dragged himself slowly from the blast that had struck him down. But his eyes came back to another spear in his hands, and his fingers were tearing at the sinew wrapping.

The spear bent in his hands; the wood was flexible and springy. It was Diane who offered the next

suggestion. She, too, was working at another spear—what wonder if her breath came fast!—but her eyes were alight, and her mind was at work.

"Make a bow!" she exclaimed. "A bow and arrow, Walter! We are fighting primitive men, so we can't scorn primitive weapons." She stopped with a little exclamation of pain; the sharp tip of the flint had cut her hand.

Chet's spearhead was unloosed. He tried the spring of the shaft. "Bully girl, Diane!" he said, and fell to gouging out a notch with the sharp flint near the end of the shaft.

The sinew made a string. Three slender sticks lying about whose ends had been sharpened for use on the meat: they would do for arrows. Each arrow must be notched and headed with an explosive shell, and there were many of them.

Chet sprang to his feet at last. Forgotten was the fatigue that had numbed him. A wild figure, his clothes in rags, his short, curling hair no longer

blond, his face a mottling of brown and black, where only here and there the white skin dared show through—he executed an intricate dance-step with a bed of lava for a floor, while he shouted:

"Bring on your fighters! Bring 'em on! Who's going to stop us now?"

They were free to go, but Harkness paused at a renewed screaming from the jungle. Again the hairy ones poured forth into the open glade. He had half raised his bow, with arrow ready, before he saw that this was no attack.

The screams merged discordantly with other sounds—a crashing of uprooted trees—a chorus of harsh coughing—snorting—unrecognizable noises. And the people were cowering in terror.

They half-ran toward the safety of their caves, but the throwers of thunder, the demons on the lava bed, were between them and their homes. They turned to face the jungle, and the wild sounds and crash of splintered wood that drew near.

Harkness saw the first head that appeared. He stared in open-mouthed amazement at the armored monster. Thick plates of shell covered its mammoth body and lapped part way over the head to end at beady, wicked, red eyes on either side of a single curved horn.

An instant the animal waited, to glare at the cowering human forms it had tracked to their lair; others crashed through beside it; and in that instant Harkness recognized the huddled group below as brothers. Far down they were, in the long, weary path that was evolution, and hardly come as yet to a consciousness of self—but there were those who leaped before the others, their long spears couched and ready; they were defending the weaker ones at their backs; they were men!

And Harkness was shouting as he raised his crude bow. "Shoot!" he ordered. "Kill the brutes!" His own arrow was speeding true.

The rush of mammoth beasts was on as he fired, but it was checked as quickly as it began. An inferno of

explosions rose about the rushing bodies; crashing detonations struck two of them down, their heads torn and crushed. Between the helpless, primordial men and the charging beasts was a geyser of spouting earth and rocks, through which showed ugly heads and tremendous bodies that wheeled and crashed madly back into the jungle growth.

Harkness suddenly realized that only he and Chet had fired. Diane's bow was on the ground. He saw the girl beside it, sitting upright; but her body was trembling and weaving, and she was plainly maintaining her upright posture only by the greatest effort.

He was beside her in an instant. "What is it?" he demanded. "Are you hurt? What is it?"

She raised her hand that he might see; her lips, seemed almost too numb for speech.

"Only a scratch," she whispered, but Harkness saw her eyes glazing. He dropped to his knees and caught her swaying body in his arms.

"A scratch," she repeated in a fading voice, "from the spear.... Poison ... I think."

A head appeared over the lava crest. Harkness saw it vaguely. He knew that Chet had the newcomer covered; his bow was drawn. It meant nothing to him, for Diane was wounded—dying! Dying, now, in his arms....

The ape-man came on; he was grovelling upon the ground. He was hairless, like the one they had seen escape the attack of the giant bat, and his cheek was slashed with a healing cut that might have been made by a ripping talon. He abased himself before the awful might of these creatures who had saved them. And he made motions with his arms to picture how they had sailed down from the skies; had landed; and he had seen them. He was plainly petitioning for pardon and the favor of these gods—when he dropped his animal head to stare at the girl and the cut hand that Harkness held in his.

The blue discoloration of the wound must have been plain in its significance. The hairless one sprang

abruptly to his feet and darted toward a cave. He was back in a moment; and, though he approached with wriggling humility, he reached the girl and he ventured to touch the discolored hand with a sticky paste. He had a gourd that he held to the girl's lips.

Harkness would have struck it away; he was beside himself with grief. But Chet interposed.

"Give it to her," he said in a sharp, strained voice that told of his own dismay. "I think the beggar knows what he's about. He is trying to help."

The lips were lax; only a little of the liquid found its way down her throat. But Harkness, after minutes of agony, saw the first flutter of lids that betokened returning life....

Chapter 10: "But Awfully Dumb...."

Harkness would never forget the helpless body in his arms, nor the tender look that came slowly to the opened eyes that gazed so steadily into his. And yet it was Chet that she seemed to want for the thousand little services during the week that followed. And Harkness tried to still the hurt in his heart, and he told himself that it was her happiness he wanted more than his; that if she found greater pleasure in having Chet near, then his love was unworthy if it placed itself as a bar to that other happiness.

He talked by signs with the hairless one whom he called Towahg. It was the sound the other made as he struck upon his chest. And he learned that Towahg could guide him to the ship.

The tribe had left them alone. Only Towahg seemed inclined to friendliness; and Harkness frequently saw the one who was their leader in ugly, silent contemplation of them when Towahg brought food and water to their cave.

Diane was recovering, but her progress was slow. She was able at once to walk and go slowly about, but the least exertion tired her. It had been a close call, Harkness knew, and he realized that some time must pass before she could take up the hardships of the trail. And in the meantime much might happen.

He felt that he must reach the ship at the first possible moment and return for the others; Towahg would show him the way. He explained the plan to Chet and Diane only to meet with emphatic dissent.

"You would go alone?" the girl exclaimed. "To meet heaven knows what dangers? No, no, Walter; you must not! Wait; I am stronger; I can go soon, I know."

Chet, too, was for delay—Diane was better, and she would improve steadily. They could carry her, at first. But Harkness looked at the jungle he must penetrate and knew that he was right.

He gave Towahg a bow and arrows like his own and those that Chet kept for defense, but the arrows were of sharpened wood without detonite tips. He grinned

toward Chet as he showed the savage how to handle the marvellous thing.

"We've advanced these people a thousand years in the science of arms," he said. "They should make Diane their first Minister of Munitions, or worship her as their own lovely goddess of the chase."

A weapon that would throw farther than the strongest man could cast a spear—here was magic indeed! And Towahg knelt and grovelled on the ground at his benefactor's feet.

Harkness made light of the dangers he must face, but he knew in his own mind he might fail. And the time of leaving found him curiously depressed. He had gripped Chet's hand, then turned to Diane for what might be a last good-by. The quick enfoldment of her soft body in his arms was as unpremeditated as the kiss he placed upon her lips.... He swung away abruptly, and fell in behind his guide without a word. The way led first across the place of smoke and fire.

Danger ahead on this strange trail; he knew it well.

But he took it as it came; and his guide, and his crude weapon, and his steady eye and sureness of foot on rocky crags all saw him through. And he mentally mapped the hills and valleys and the outcrops of metals that he would explore some later time. Only seven of the short six-hour days of this little earth had passed when he drew near the ship.

He was ready for an attack. There was the broken rubble that marked the entrance of the cave. Beneath it, he knew, were mangled, horrible remains. This one beast alone, it seemed, had been the ruler of the valley, for no other appeared.

The mass that had blocked the doorway was crystalline now, and broke to brittle fragments at a blow. He entered the familiar cabin of the ship. There was nothing disturbed; the sealed inner door had barred entrance to any inquiring beasts.

Far down the valley he saw a naked, running figure. Towahg had escorted this sky-god to the great bird that had brought him, but the courage of even so advanced a tribesman as he must have limits. He was

still running along the path they had come when Harkness closed and sealed the door.

There was an instrument among their stores for taking samples of gas. Harkness attached it to the ship before he left, and he took a few precious minutes for a flight into the heights. That gas up there was fatal to the monsters of space: he must secure a sample and learn its composition.

A closing of the switch on wires that led to the instrument outside, and he knew that the container had emptied its contents of water, drawn in the gas and sealed itself.

Then the swift descent.

He flew low as he circled back. They had traveled far on their journey below ground; it was even a longer route where he and Towahg had circled about. But it was the only route he knew; he could take no chances on a short-cut and a possible long-drawn search for the little valley.

He followed the trail. The quick dusk was near; but in an hour's slow flying, while his eyes searched the hills and hollows, the valley was in sight.

He came down slowly in a black sky, with only the soft, muffled roar of the lower exhausts. It was growing dark, and he leaned from an open door to see more clearly his position. All was different from the air, and he needed time and careful scrutiny to get the bearings of the place.

The soft thunder from below was in his ears when a sound pierced through. His own name! And it was Diane's voice calling him in a terrified tone.

"Walter!" she cried. "Help! Help! Oh, Walter, come quickly!"

The scene below was lighted by fitful fires. He was above the upper valley, a hundred yards from their cave: his mind was oriented in an instant, and he knew each foot of ground.

And here, where neither Diane nor Chet should be,

was Diane. He saw her running in the bright glare of his landing light that he now switched on; saw a black shape hurl itself upon her; she was struggling. He threw himself back at the controls to send the ship like a thunderbolt upon the earth.

A pistol was in his hand as he leaped from the still-rocking ship and threw himself upon the thing that ran and tried to carry a struggling burden in its arms.

He could not fire; but he brought the pistol down upon a heavy skull. The hairy figure seemed never to feel the blow. It dropped the body of Diane and turned, and its slavering, shining fangs were set in a horrible face that Harkness recognized.

It was the leader of the tribe, and he had dared to attack. But where was Chet? What of his arrows and their detonite tips? These thoughts were crowding through his mind in the instant that ape-like fingers gripped at his throat—the instant while he was bringing the pistol forward and up.

A light charge of detonite in pistol ammunition—but

no living body could withstand the shock. Harkness leaped over the fallen foe to reach the girl. She was half risen to a sitting posture as he came.

"Dieu!" she was whispering; "Ah, le bon Dieu!" Then she cried out: "Walter! Oh, Walter, they have killed Chet! Down there!" Her hand was pointing. She grasped at Harkness' hand to draw herself to her feet and race with him toward the cave.

"Just at dark," she explained gaspingly as they ran. "It was their chief, and there were others with him. They leaped upon Chet—before he could reach for his bow. They had seemed so friendly after you left—but they were short of food—"

Her voice was sobbing now, but she kept on, and she set a pace that Harkness could not outdistance.

"One aimed a spear at me, and Chet threw himself between. I saw the spear strike—then I ran. I thought I heard your motors—I screamed for you—"

They were nearing the caves. A fire was burning in

the open glade where grotesque figures leaped and danced in cannibal glee about a figure that lay motionless upon the ground.

The tattered, wind-blown clothing—the curling hair, blond in the fire's light—it was Chet.... And now Harkness could fire.

His pistol held twenty rounds. He emptied it into the shrieking group, then jammed in more of the shells and fired again. He fired until no target remained, and every savage figure was either vanished among the trees or inert and lifeless upon the ground, their only motion the stirring of their hairy coverings in the breeze.

Harkness was beside the prostrate figure. He raised Chet's head within his arms; Diane's brown head leaned close, her gasping breath broken by dry sobs. The firelight flickered upon the closed lids to give them semblance of life.

"Chet," said Walter Harkness softly. "Chet, old man—can't you speak? We'll save you, Chet; you're not done

for yet." But he felt as he spoke that the words were a horrible lie; the blood that ran slowly now from a wound in Chet's side seemed to speak more truly than did he.

Yet Chet Bullard opened his eyes. His breath was the merest flutter; the listeners bent their heads close to hear.

"Made it, did you?" asked Chet in a ghastly whisper. "And you've saved Diane?... Good!... Well, it's been a great trip.... It's been worth the price...."

Harkness seized at the girl's name. Here was something that might strike home to the sinking man; might rouse him.

"Yes, Diane is saved," he told Chet: "saved for you, old fellow. You must live—for Diane's sake. You love her, and she needs you."

Again the tired eyes opened. Once more the fluttering breath formed words; lips moved to bring a pale ghost of Chet's ready smile like a passing light across his

face.

"Needs me? Diane?" It was a question and a denial. He was looking straight at Harkness as he added: "It's you she needs.... You're one square old sport, Walt, but dumb—awfully dumb...."

Glorious adventure!—and the price is so often death. "A great trip," Chet Bullard had said; "it's been worth the price." Chet was prepared to pay in full.

But—there was the ship! Walt Harkness, as she finished bandaging the body of the unconscious man, stared first at the metal cylinder, gleaming, brilliant in the Earthlight; then his gaze went to the Earth that had risen over distant peaks with the glory of a thousand moons. And he dared to hope.

He brought the ship softly to rest close to where Chet lay, then placed the limp form on the self-adjusting floor of the control room. There must be no shifting of the body as the pull of gravitation ceased. Soft blankets made a resting place for him.

The entrance port was closed and sealed; and the ship rose gently under his touch. And, below them, the mirrors showed a world that sank away. Diane's head was pressed near to his to watch that vanishing world.

Each rugged mountain was softened in the Earthlight's mellow glow; they melted together, and lost all sharpness of form. And the light faded and vanished as they rose into the blanket of gas that blocked off the return rays and made of this world a dark moon.

No regret now for the territory that was unexplored. Harkness told himself he would return. And, with the vanishing of that world his thoughts were only of the little flame of life that still flickered in Chet's body, and of the Earth, and of the metal ball that was swinging them out and away.... The sound of the stern exhaust built up and up to the roaring thunder that meant the blast was opened full....

Chapter 11: "Nothing to Be Done"

Unmoving, their ship seemed, through the long hours. Yet there were lights that passed swiftly and unnoticed, and the unending thunder from the stern gave assurance that they were not floating idly in the vast sea of space.

The sun was behind them, and ahead was Earth in midday glory; Harkness could not tear his eyes away from that goal. He stood always at the controls, not because there was work to be done, but for the feeling it gave him of urging the ship onward.

Diane ministered to Chet and dressed the wound. There were few words exchanged between them.

The menace that had emptied Earth's higher levels of all aircraft was still there. No ships were in sight, as Harkness guided his ship toward the great sphere. His speed had been cut down, yet still he outraced the occasional, luminous, writhing forms that threw themselves upon them. Then the repelling area—and he crashed silently through and down, with their

forward exhaust roaring madly to hold them in check.

A sea and a shoreline, where a peninsula projected like a giant boot—and he knew it for Italy and the waters of the Mediterranean.

"Vienna," Diane was telling him; "go to Vienna! It is nearby. And I know of a surgeon—one of the greatest!"

And an hour later, a quiet, confident man was telling them: "But yes!—of a certainty he will live. It is fortunate that you were not very far away when the accident occurred." And only then did Harkness catch Diana's eyes in an exchange of glances where unbearable relief was tempered with amusement.

The great hospital had its own landing stages on its broad roof. Their ship was anchored there, an object to excite the curiosity of a gathering throng.

"Not a healthy place for me, here in Vienna," Harkness remarked. He was lifting the ship from its anchorage, its errand of mercy done.

"Now where?" he pondered aloud. The strain of the flight was telling on him.

The girl recognized the strained look in his eyes, the deep lines that their experiences had etched upon his face. Gently she drew his hand from the controls.

"I will take it," she said. "Trust me. Lie down and rest."

Harkness had witnessed an example of her flying skill; she could handle the ship, he knew. And he threw himself upon a cot in the cabin to sink under the weight of overpowering fatigue.

He felt the soft shock of their landing. Diane was calling him, her hand extended to lead him from the open port. But he was wrenched sharply from the lethargy that held him at sight of his surroundings, and the memories they recalled.

They were in a park, and their ship rested upon a spacious lawn. Beyond were trees where a ship had shot crashingly through storm-tossed limbs. And,

before him, a chateau, where a window had framed the picture of a girl with outstretched arms.

"Trust me," Diane had said. And he did trust her. But did she not know what this meant? She was delivering him into the enemy's hands. He should have kept himself from sight until he had rallied his forces.... He was stammering words of protest as she led him toward the door. Armed guards were already between him and the ship.

In a dark-panelled room Herr Schwartzmann was waiting. His gasp of amazement as he sprang to his feet reflected the utter astonishment written upon his face, until that look gave place to one of satisfaction.

"Mademoiselle," he exclaimed, "—my dear Mademoiselle Diane! We had given you up for lost. I thought—I thought—"

"Yes," said Diane quietly, "I believe that I can well imagine what you thought."

"Ah!" said Herr Schwartzmann, and the look of

satisfaction deepened. "I see that you understand now; you will be with us in this matter. We have plans for this young man's disposal."

The puzzled wonder that had clouded the steady eyes of Walter Harkness was replaced by cold anger and more than a trace of contempt.

"You can forget those plans," he told Schwartzmann. "I have plans of my own."

"Poof!" exclaimed the heavy, bearded man. "We will crush you like that!" He struck one heavy fist upon the desk. "And what will you do?"

"Several things," said Harkness evenly. "I shall rid the upper levels of the monsters: I have a gas that will accomplish that. I shall restore the world's flying to normal. And, with that attended to, I will give you my undivided attention—raise forty kinds of hell with Herr Schwartzmann and the interests he represents.

"Forgery! Theft! The seizing of my properties by virtue of a lying document! You shall see what this

leads to. Your companies will be wrecked; not a decent man or woman engaged in the business of a decent world will deal with you: that is a small part of what I plan."

The dark face of Herr Schwartzmann was flushed with anger. "You will never leave this place—" he began. But Harkness would not let him go on: his voice was as hard as the metal of his ship.

"You and your assassins!" he said contemptuously. "You don't dare touch me. There is another man who knows—and Diane, too." He paused to look into the eyes of the girl, which were regarding him with an inscrutable expression. "I do not know why she brought me here, but Diane also knows. You can't throttle us all."

"Diane!" The exclamation was wrung involuntarily from Schwartzmann's lips. "You speak of Mademoiselle Vernier so familiarly?"

The girl's cool voice broke in. She had watched the meeting of the men in silence; she spoke now as one

taking matters into her own quite capable hands.

"You may omit the incognito, Herr Schwartzmann," she said; "it is no longer required. I have enjoyed a birthday since last we met: it was passed in a place of darkness and anguish, where strong men and brave forgot their own suffering to try by every means to bring comfort to a girl who was facing death. For that reason I say that I enjoyed it.... And that birthday was my twenty-first. You know what that means."

"But Mademoiselle Vernier—pardon!—Mam'selle Delacoeur, surely you will support me. My trusteeship during all these successful years—"

"Is at an end," said the cool voice.

"I learned more than you were aware of in this last year while I familiarized myself with the interests that would soon be mine. No, Herr Schwartzmann, your methods do not appeal to me; they are an anachronism in the world of to-day."

Harkness was standing in stunned silence.

"Delacoeur!" Diane was Mademoiselle Delacoeur! But that name had been borne by the wealthiest house of France! Old Delacoeur had died, possessed of millions beyond counting—and he had left a daughter—Diane!

His mind could not grasp the full significance of this. But one thing was clear: he could not aspire to the love of one of the queens of Earth. Whatever faint hope that remained in his heart was lost.... The cool voice was still speaking.

"You may leave now," she was saying—this girl who had been his comrade, so unfailingly tender, so true and steady in the face of incredible dangers. And Herr Schwartzmann took his dismissal as one who cannot dispute his superior.

The room was silent. Harkness stood with downcast eyes that followed with meticulous precision the intricacies of design in the rug on which he stood. A voice was speaking. Not the cool, imperative voice of Mademoiselle Delacoeur, mistress of vast estates, but the voice of Diane—the Diane he had learned to love—and it tore at his emotions until his mind was a

whirl of conflicting thoughts.

A tender voice: and there was laughter in it and in the eyes that his own came despondently to meet.

"Such a man, this Walter Harkness!" she was saying. "So hard, so vindictive! Ah, the trouble he will make for me because of my conscienceless agents!"

Harkness threw out his hands in a helpless gesture. "Don't taunt me," he said. "You know you have me tied. You've drawn the charges from all my guns. There is nothing to be done."

Diane Delacoeur drew near. The raillery was gone from her voice, and the hand that she placed on his arm was trembling.

"Nothing?" she inquired. "Then, if friendly rivalry is impossible, would you consider, could there not be arranged—a merger of our interests? I am not thinking now of wealth, of which you will have far more than I: there are so much greater things in life —"

The eyes that clung to his were pleading now. And within them was the light that Walter Harkness at last could understand and define. He took the trembling hand in one of his that was suddenly strong, and with the other he raised a lovely face that no longer dared to meet his look.

"You mean—" he began, and fumbled for words to express an emotion that was beyond words. "Chet said—why, he said—that you needed me—"

Her reply came mingled with a tremulous laugh.

"I have the greatest regard," she whispered, "for Chet's judgement. But—do you—need me?"

Walt Harkness held the soft body close; bent nearer to catch the words. And he answered them with his own lips in an ecstasy of emotion that made nothing of the thrills to be found in that other conquest—of a Dark Moon.

85 When Caverns Yawned by Sterner St. Paul Meek [[HERE]]

Only Dr. Bird's super-scientific sleuthing stands in the way of Ivan Saranoff's latest attempt at wholesale destruction.

Aproximate word count: 9,900

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

Bells jangled discordantly. A whistle split the air with a piercing note. A band blared away on the platform. With a growing rumble of sound, the Presidential special slowly gathered headway. The President waved a final farewell to the crowds at the platform and sat down. He chatted cheerily with his companions until the train was clear of Charleston, then rose, and with a word to the others stepped into the car. Operative Carnes of the United States Service slumped back in his chair with a sigh of relief.

"Thank Goodness, that's over," he said. "I was never so glad to get him safely away from a place in my life."

Haggerty of the secret service nodded in agreement. Colonel Holmes, the military aide, looked up inquiringly.

"Why so? Do you think Charleston an especially dangerous place for him to be?"

"Not ordinarily. Charleston is a very patriotic and loyal city, but I have been worried. There have been vague rumors going around. Nothing definite that we could pin down, but enough to make me pretty uneasy."

"I think you've worried needlessly. I have been in constant touch with the Military Intelligence Division and they have reported nothing alarming."

Haggerty chuckled at the look of disgust that spread over Carnes' face. Colonel Holmes bridled visibly.

"Now look here, Carnes," he began.

"Oh, horse-feathers!" interrupted Carnes. "The M.I.D. is all right in its place—Good Lord! What's that?"

The train gave a sudden sickening lurch. Colonel Holmes sprawled in an undignified heap in one corner of the observation platform. Carnes and Haggerty kept their feet by hanging on to the rails. From the interior of the car came cries of alarm. The train righted itself for a moment and then lurched worse than before. There was a scream of brakes as the engineer strove to halt the forward progress. The train swayed and lurched like a ship in a storm. Carnes sprang for the telephone connected with the engine cab and rang excitedly.

"Hello, Bemis," he cried when an answer came: "take off the brakes! Keep moving at full speed, no matter what happens. What? Use your gun on him, man! Keep moving even if the train tips over!"

The train swayed and rocked worse than ever as it began to gather momentum. Carnes looked back

along the track and gasped. For three hundred yards behind them, the track was sinking out of sight. The train forged ahead, but it was evident that it also was sinking into the ground. The track behind them suddenly gave. With a roar like a hundred buildings collapsing, it sank out of sight in a cloud of dust. The rear car of the train hung partially over the yawning cavern in the earth for an instant before the laboring engine dragged it to solid ground. The swaying and lurching grew less. For a mile it persisted to a slight degree. With a face the color of a sheet, Carnes made his way into the train. The President met him at the door.

"What's the trouble, Carnes?" he demanded.

"I am not sure, Mr. President. It felt like an earthquake. A great cavern opened in the earth behind us. Our train was almost trapped in it."

"An earthquake! We must stop the train at once and take charge of the situation. An emergency of that sort demands immediate attention."

"I beg you to do nothing of the sort, sir. Your presence would add little to the rescue work and your life is too precious to risk."

"But my duty to the people—"

"Is to keep yourself alive, sir! Mr. President, this may well be an attempt on your life. There are persons who would give anything to do away with you, especially at present. You have not endeared yourself to a certain class in calling for a conference of the powers to curb Russia's anti-religious tactics."

The President hesitated. He knew Carnes well enough to know that he usually spoke from accurate knowledge and with good judgment.

"Mr. President," went on the operative earnestly, "I am responsible to the American people for your safety. I beg you to follow my advice."

"Very well, Carnes," replied the President, "I'll put myself in your hands for the present. What is your program?"

"Your route is well known. Other attempts may be planned since this one failed. Let me have you transferred incognito to another train and hurried through to Washington secretly. I am going to drop off and go back. That earthquake needs to be looked into."

Again the President hesitated.

"My desertion of the stricken area will not be favorably regarded. If I sneak away secretly as though in fear, it will be bad for the public morale."

"We'll let the special go through. No one need know that you have left it."

"Well—I guess you're right. What are you going to do about it?"

"My first move will be to summon Dr. Bird from Washington."

"That's a good move. You'd better have him bring Dr. Lassen with him. Lassen is a great volcano and

earthquake specialist, you know."

"I will, sir. If you will get ready to drop off at the next connecting point, I'll send Haggerty and Bemis with you. The rest of the party can remain on the special."

"All right, Carnes, if you insist."

Carnes went forward to the operator of the train's radio set. In half an hour the special came to a stop at a junction point and four men got off. Ten minutes later three of them climbed aboard another train which stopped for them. Carnes, the fourth man, hurried to a telephone. Fifteen minutes later he was talking to Dr. Bird at the latter's private laboratory in the Bureau of Standards.

"An earthquake, Carnes?" exclaimed the doctor as the operative described the happenings. "Wait a few minutes, will you?"

In five minutes he was back on the telephone.

"It was no earthquake, old dear, whatever it may have

been. I have examined the records of all three of the Bureau's seismographs. None of them record even a tremor. What are you going to do?"

"Whatever you say, Doctor. I'm out of my depth already."

"Let me think a moment. All right, listen. Go back to Charleston as quickly as you can and get in touch with the commanding officer at Fort Moultrie. I'll have the Secretary of War telephone him and give him orders. Get troops and go to the scene of the catastrophe. Allow no one near it. Proclaim martial law if necessary. Stop all road and rail traffic within a radius of two miles. Arrest anyone trying to pass your guard lines. I'll get a plane from Langley Field and come down on the run. Is that all clear?"

"Perfectly, Doctor. By the way, the President suggested that you bring Dr. Lassen with you."

"Since it wasn't an earthquake, he wouldn't be of much value. However, I'll bring him if I can get hold of him. Now start things moving down there. I'll get

some apparatus together and join you in five hours; six at the outside. Have a car waiting for me at the Charleston airport."

Carnes commandeered a passing car and drove back to Charleston. He made a wide sweep to avoid the disturbed area and went direct to Fort Moultrie. Dr. Bird had been good at his word. The troops were assembled in heavy marching order when the detective arrived. A few words to the commanding officer was sufficient to set the trucks loaded with soldiers in motion. Carnes, accompanied by the colonel and his staff, went direct to the scene of the catastrophe.

He found a hole in the ground, a hundred feet wide and a quarter of a mile long, sunk to a depth of fifty feet. He shuddered as he thought of what would have happened had the Presidential train been in the center of the devastated area instead of at the edge. The edges of the hole were ragged and sloping as though the earth had caved in to fill a huge cavern underground.

State and local authorities were already on the ground, striving to hold back sightseers. They were very glad to deliver their responsibility to the representative of the federal government. Carnes added their force to that of the military. In an hour a cordon of guards were stationed about the cavern while every road was picketed two miles away. Fortunately there had been no loss of life and no rescue work was needed. The earth-shaking had been purely a local matter, centered along the line of the railroad track.

There was nothing to do but wait, Carnes thought furiously. He had worked with Dr. Bird long enough to have a fair idea of the scientist's usual lines of investigation.

"The first thing he'll want to do is to explore that hole," he mused. "Probably, that'll mean some excavating. I'd better get a wrecking train with a crane on it and a steam shovel here. A gang of men with picks and shovels might be useful, too."

He hurried to the railroad officials. The sight of his

gold badge had the desired result. Telegraph keys began to click and telephones to ring. Carnes was sorely tempted to explore the hole himself, but he resisted the temptation. Dr. Bird was not always pleasant when his colleagues departed from the orders he had given.

The morning passed, and the first part of the afternoon. Two wrecking trains stood with steam up at the edge of the hole. Grouped by the trains were a hundred negroes with shovels and picks. Carnes sat at the edge of the hole and stared down into it. He was roused from his reverie by the sound of a motor.

From the north came an airplane. High over the hole it passed, and then swerved and descended. On the under side of the wings could be seen the insignia of the Air Corps. Carnes jumped to his feet and waved his hat. Lower came the plane until it roared across the cavern less than a hundred feet above the ground. Two figures leaned out and examined the terrain carefully. Carnes waved again. One of the figures waved a hand in reply. The plane rose in the air and straightened out toward Charleston.

"We'll have the doctor here in a few minutes now," said Carnes to the Colonel. "It might be a good plan to send a motorcycle out along the Charleston road to bring him in. We don't want the guards to delay him."

The colonel gave an order and a motorcycle shot off down the road. In half an hour it came sputtering back with a huge Cadillac roaring in its wake. The car drew up and stopped. From it descended two men. The first was a small, wizened figure with heavy glasses. What hair age had left to him was as white as snow. The second figure, which towered over the first, was one to merit attention anywhere.

Dr. Bird was as light on his feet and as quick and graceful as a cat, but there was nothing feline about his appearance. He stood well over six feet in his stockings and tipped the beam close to the two hundred mark. Not one ounce of fat was on his huge frame. So fine was he drawn that unless one looked closely he would never suspect the weight of bone and muscle that his unobtrusive tweed suit covered. Piercing black eyes looked out from under shaggy brows. His face was lean and browned, and it took a

second glance to realize the tremendous height and breadth of his forehead. A craggy jutting chin spoke of stubbornness and the relentless following up of a line of action determined on. His head was topped with an unruly shock of black hair which he tossed back with a hand that commanded instant attention.

His hands were the most noteworthy thing about the famous Bureau scientist. Long slender hands, they were, with slim tapering fingers—the hands of an artist and a dreamer. The acid stains that marred them could not hide their slim beauty, yet Carnes knew that those hands had muscles like steel wire and that the doctor boasted a grip that could crush the hand of a professional wrestler. He had seen him tear a deck of playing cards in half and, after doubling, again in half, with as little effort as the ordinary man would use in tearing a bare dozen of the cards. As he climbed out of the car his keen black eyes swept around in a comprehensive glance. Carnes, trained observer that he was, knew that in that one glance every essential detail which it had taken him an hour to place had been accurately noted

and stored away in the doctor's mind. He came forward to the detective.

"Has anything happened since you telephoned me?" was his first question.

"Nothing, Doctor. I followed your instructions and also assembled a crew of men with excavating tools."

"You're improving, Carnes. This is Dr. Lassen. This is a little out of your line. Doctor, but you may see something familiar. What does it look like to you?"

"Not like an earthquake, Bird, at all events. Offhand I would say that a huge cavern had been washed in the earth and the ground had caved in."

"It looks that way. If you are right, we should find running water if we dig deep enough. Have you been down in the hole, Carnes?"

"No, Doctor."

"Then that's the first thing to do. You have ropes, of

course?"

Carnes called to the waiting gang of negroes and a dozen of these hurried up with ropes. Dr. Bird slung a rope around his body under his arms and was lowered into the hole. The rope slackened as he reached bottom. Carnes lay on his stomach and looked over the edge. Dr. Bird was gingerly picking his way across the ground. He turned and called up.

"Carnes, you and Lassen can come down if you care to."

In a few minutes the detective and the volcanologist joined him in the cavern. The top surface of the ground was rolled up into waves like the sea. The sides of the hole were almost sheer. The naked rock was exposed for thirty feet. Above the rock could be seen the subsoil, and then the layer of top soil and vegetation. Dr. Bird was carefully examining the rock wall.

"What do you make of these, Lassen?" he asked, pointing to a row of horizontal striations in the rock.

The volcanologist studied them.

"They might be water marks but if so they are different from any that I have seen before," he said doubtfully. "It looks as though some force had cut the rock away in one sharp stroke."

"Exactly. Notice this yellow powder on the ridges. Water would have washed it away."

Dr. Bird stepped forward to the wall and idly attempted to pick up a pinch of the yellow powder he had referred to in his fingers. He gave an exclamation of surprise as he did so. The powder was evidently fast to the wall. He drew his knife from his pocket and pried at the stuff. It fell readily. He scraped again and caught a speck of the falling powder in his hand. He gave a cry of surprise, for his hand sank as though borne down by a heavy weight. With an effort he lifted his hand and examined the substance.

"Come here, Carnes," he said. "Hold your hand up to catch some of this powder as I scrape it off."

The detective held up his hand. Dr. Bird pried with his knife and a shower of dull yellow particles fell.

Carnes' hand sank as though the bits of dust had been a lead bar. He placed his other hand under it and with an effort lifted both hands up a few inches.

"What on earth is this stuff, Doctor?" he cried. "It's as heavy as lead."

"It's a great deal heavier than lead, Carnesy, old dear. I don't know what it is. I am inclined to think you did a wise thing when you sent for me. Lassen, take a look at this stuff. Did you ever run into anything like it?"

The aged volcanologist shook his head. The yellow powder was something beyond his ken.

"I have been poking around volcanos all my life," he said, "and I have seen some queer things come out of the ground—but nothing like that."

Dr. Bird poked tentatively at the substance for a moment, his brow furrowed in lines of thought. He

suddenly threw back his shoulders in a gesture of decision.

"Send a gang of excavators down here," he cried.
"Never mind the power shovel at present."

Down the ropes swarmed the gang of negroes. Dr. Bird indicated an area at one end of the cavern and directed them to dig. The blacks flew to work with a will. The top soil and subsoil were rapidly tossed into buckets and hauled to the surface. When bare rock lay before them, the negroes ceased their efforts.

"What next, Doctuh, suh?" asked the foreman.

"Get dynamite!" cried the doctor. "If I'm right, this underground cavern is entered by a tunnel. We'll blast away this caved-in rock until we locate it."

Then occurred a strange thing.

"There is no need to go to that trouble, Dr. Bird," spoke a metallic voice, from nowhere, it seemed. The negroes looked at one another. Picks and shovels fell

from nerveless hands.

"Your guess about a tunnel is correct, Doctor," went on the Voice. "There is a tunnel leading away from the spot where you are, but to find the end would be useless to you. I have prepared for that."

From the blacks came a low moan of fear.

"Ha'nts!" cried one of them. The cry was taken up and spread into a rolling chorus of fear. With one accord they dropped their tools and stampeded in a mad rush toward the dangling ropes. Carnes sprang forward to stop them.

"Let them go, Carnes!" cried the doctor. "Their work is done for the present. Let's locate that radio receiver."

"That also will be a useless search. Doctor," spoke up the Voice again. "I have perfected a transmitter which will send my voice through space and make it audible without the aid of the clumsy apparatus you depend on. I am also able to see you through the miles of

intervening rock without the aid of any instruments at your end."

"I presume that you can hear me as well?"

"Certainly, Doctor. To save you trouble—and I dislike to see you waste the efforts of your really good brain on minor problems—I will tell you that your surmise is correct. A tunnel does lead both to and from the place where you stand. It twists and turns so that even you would be puzzled to plot a general direction. You would have to follow it inch by inch. If you tried that, naturally I would cause it to collapse before you, or on top of you, if you got too close. Be content with what you have seen and seek a better way to trace me."

"Who are you, anyway?" blurted out Carnes.

"Is it possible that you do not know? Such is fame. I thought that at least my friend Mr. Carnes would suspect that Ivan Saranoff had done this."

"But you're dead!" protested the detective. "We killed

you when we destroyed your helicopter."

"You killed merely an assistant who had disobeyed my orders. Had I not decreed his death, he would be alive to-day. I could kill you as you stand there; resolve you into nothingness; but I do not choose to do so—yet. Other attempts I have made you have frustrated, but this time I shall succeed. I will institute a reign of terror which will bring your rich, foolish country to its knees. Listen, while I give you a taste of my power. The city of Charleston is about to be destroyed."

A thunderous roaring filled the air. Crash followed crash in rapid succession. It sounded as though all the noise of the universe had been concentrated in the cavern. The earth shook and rocked like a restless sea. From above came cries of terror.

The three men in the cavern were thrown to the ground. Shaken by the fall and deafened by the tumult, they hung onto irregularities of the rock on which they lay. Gradually the tumult and the shaking subsided. The cries from above became more apparent. Silence finally reigned in the cavern and

the metallic Voice spoke again.

"Go back now and look at Charleston and you will see what to expect. The rest of your cities will soon share the same fate. Beware of trying to trace my movements, for your lives are in the hollow of my hand."

The voice died away in silence. From the edge of the hole came a cry. A Fort Moultrie officer was peering down at them.

"Are you all right down there?" he hailed.

"Right as hops," called Dr. Bird cheerfully. "What happened up above?"

"I don't know, Doctor. There seems to be a lot of smoke and fire over in the direction of the city. I expect the quake shook them up a little this time. What shall we do now?"

"We're ready to come up. First I'm going to send up a wheelbarrow full of yellow powder. Rig a crane to lift

it, for it's too heavy to try to hoist with ropes."

With the aid of Carnes and Dr. Lassen, Dr. Bird collected a few cubic inches of the yellow powder from the ridges in the rock. He made the wheelbarrow containing it fast to the wire cables of the crane and gave the signal. Slowly it was raised to the surface. When it had safely reached there he turned to his companions.

"Grab a rope and let's go," he said.

In a few moments they were on the upper level. With the efforts of half a dozen men, the body of the wheelbarrow was lifted into the car. With a few final words of instruction to the colonel, Dr. Bird and his companions entered the car and were whisked away to the city.

A spectacle of destruction and ruin awaited them. Fully one-fourth of the city had sunk thirty feet into the ground. The sinking was not even nor uniform. The sunken ground was rolled into huge waves while buildings which had collapsed lay in confused heaps

on all sides. From a dozen places in the area, columns of fire rose in the air.

Dr. Bird wasted little time on the scene before him. His car skirted the edge of the huge hole and took the road toward the Charleston airport, which was in a section which had suffered little. In half an hour the army transport roared into the air carrying Dr. Bird's precious load of yellow powder. Four hours later they dropped to a landing at Langley Field.

"Now, Carnes," said the doctor as they debarked from the plane, "there is work ahead. It may be too late to do much to-night, but we have no time to waste. Get Bolton on the wire and tell him that we have positive evidence that Saranoff is still alive and still up to his devil's tricks. Start every man of the secret service and every Department of Justice agent that can be spared on the trail. He can't live underground all the time, and you ought to get on his tracks somehow. I'm going up to the laboratory and see what I can do with this stuff. Report to me there to-morrow morning."

Carnes hurried away. Bolton, the chief of the United

States Secret Service, had long ago recovered from any professional jealousy he had ever felt of Dr. Bird. The doctor's message that Ivan Saranoff, the arch-enemy of society, the head of the Young Labor party, the unofficial chief of the secret Soviet forces in the United States, was alive and again in the field against law and order was enough to set in motion every force that he controlled. Waving aside precedent and crashing his way past secretaries, he set in motion not only the agents of the Department of Justice but also the post-office forces and the specialized but highly efficient Military and Naval Intelligence Divisions. The telephone and telegraph wires from Washington were kept busy all night carrying orders and bringing in reports. But despite all this activity, it was with a disappointed face that Operative Carnes sought the doctor in the morning.

Dr. Bird was in his private laboratory on the third floor of the Bureau of Standards. When Carnes entered he was seated in a chair at his desk. His black eyes shone out from a chalky face like two burned holes in a blanket. Carnes started at the

appearance of utter weariness presented by the famous scientist. Dr. Bird straightened up and squared his shoulders as the detective entered.

"Any luck, Carnes?" he asked eagerly.

"None at all, Doctor. We haven't been able to get a single trace of his corporeal existence since that submarine was destroyed off the Massachusetts coast. All we have is Karuska's word that he is still alive."

"We heard his voice yesterday."

"His or another's."

"True. Have you set in motion every agency that the government has?"

"Every one. Either Bolton or I have talked to the Chief of Police in every large city in the United States and Canada. Every known member of the Young Labor party who is above the mere rank and file is under close surveillance."

"Good enough. Keep at it and you'll trace him eventually. As soon as I get a few quarts of black coffee into my system, I'll start another line of search going."

"What did you find out last night?"

"I found that our seismograph recorded the Charleston disaster. It was merely a faint jog, about what should be caused by a severe landslide. The disaster did not affect the earth's crust, but was purely local. That gives me a clue to his method."

"I described the affair to Bolton and he suggested that it might be caused by a disintegrating ray."

Dr. Bird snorted. "When will people learn that there is not, and in the nature of things never can be, a disintegrating ray?" he exclaimed. "Of course a ray can be made which will tear things down to their constituent elements, but matter is indestructible, and the idea of wiping matter out of existence is absurd."

"But I have heard you say that matter and energy were interchangeable."

"That is a different proposition. I believe they are. In fact, if you remember, Carmichael proved it, although the proof was lost at his death. Nothing of the sort was done at Charleston, however. Do you know how much energy is contained in matter? Well, a cubic inch of copper would drive the largest ship afloat around the world twice, and across the Atlantic to boot. The energy contained in the cubic yards of rock that were removed under Charleston would have blown the world to fragments."

"Then what did happen?"

"Matter, as you know, is composed of atoms. These atoms are as far from one another, compared to their size, as the stars and planets of the universe. Each atom in turn is composed of electrons, negative particles of electrical energy, held in position about a fixed central nucleus of positive electricity known as a proton. I speak now of the simplest element. Most of them have many protons and electrons in their make-

up. The space between these particles compared with their size is such that the universe would be crowded in comparison."

"What does that lead to?"

"I have described the composition of lead, the densest known element, over thirteen times as heavy as water, bulk for bulk. Conceive what it would mean if some force could compress together these widely separated particles until they touched. The resulting substance would be an element of almost inconceivable density. Such a condition is approached in the stars, some of which are as high as four thousand times as dense as the earth. What Saranoff has done is to find some way of compressing together the atoms into that yellow powder which we found in the cavern. He has not gone to the limit, for the stuff is only a little over four thousand times as dense as water. A cubic inch of it weighs one hundred and thirty-two pounds. With its density increased to that extent, the volume is reduced accordingly. That was what accounted for those caverns into which the earth tumbled."

"I'll believe you, Doctor," replied the detective; "but I'd believe you just as quickly if you swore that the moon was made of cream cheese made from the milk taken from the milky way. One would be just as understandable to me as the other."

They were interrupted by the entrance of a waiter who bore a huge pot of steaming coffee. Dr. Bird's eyes lighted up as a cup was poured. Carnes knew enough not to interrupt while the doctor poured and drank eight cups of the strong black fluid. As he drank, the lines of fatigue disappeared from the scientist's face. He sat up as fresh as though he had not been working at high pressure the entire night.

"Dr. Fisher tells me that the amount of caffeine I drink would kill a horse," he said with a chuckle; "but sometimes it is needed. I feel better now. Let's get to work."

"What shall we do?"

"Despite Saranoff's words, it must be possible to trace him. He is undoubtedly releasing his energy from

some form of subterranean borer, and such a thing can be located. The energy he uses must set up electrical disturbances which instruments will detect. I have had work started on a number of ultra-sensitive wave detectors which will record any wave-length from zero to five millimeters. We'll send them to various points along the seacoast. They ought to pick up the stray waves from the energy he is using to blast a path through the earth. I'm not going to bother with the waves from his motor; they may be of any wave-length, and there would be constant false alarms. I have another idea."

"What is it?"

"I am judging Saranoff from his previous actions. You remember that he used a submarine in that alien-smuggling scheme the Coast Guard broke up, and also when he loosed that sea monster on the Atlantic shipping? He seems to be rather fond of submarines."

"Well?"

The amount of energy he uses must be almost

inconceivable," Dr. Bird went on. "He can hardly carry an amount of fuel which will enable him to bore underground for very many miles, Charleston is on the coast. I have an idea that he uses a submarine to transport his borer from point to point. After using the borer he must return to the submarine for recharging and transportation to the point where he plans to strike next. I already have two hundred planes scouring the sea looking for such a craft."

"Where do you expect him to strike next?"

"I have no idea. New York and Washington will undoubtedly be targets eventually, but neither of them may be next. Meanwhile, would you like to do a little more flying?"

"Surely."

"A plane is waiting for us at Langley Field. I want to look over the coast in the vicinity of Charleston Harbor and some of the sounds near there. If he is using a sub, he must have a base somewhere."

With a competent pilot at the stick, Carnes and the Doctor spent the day in exploring. The day yielded no results, and with the coming of dusk they landed at Savannah for the night. Carnes talked with Bolton over the telephone, but the secret service chief could report no favorable progress. Tired and disgusted, they retired early, but they were not destined to enjoy a night of uninterrupted sleep. At one o'clock a telegram was brought to their room. Dr. Bird tore it open and glanced sleepily at it.

"Get up, Carnes," he cried sharply. "Read this!"

The yawning detective glanced at the telegram. It contained only two words and a signature. It was signed "Ivan," and read simply, "Watch Wilmington."

"What the dickens?" he exclaimed as he studied the yellow slip. Dr. Bird was hurriedly pulling on his clothes.

"Saranoff has slipped a cog this time," said the doctor. "He sent that as a night message, but it was delivered as a straight message through error. He has got

further north than I expected. We will turn out our pilot and take off. We should make Wilmington by daybreak. I'll telephone Washington and have a couple of destroyers started up Delaware Bay at once. We ought to give him a first class surprise party. I suppose that Philadelphia was meant to be his next stop."

In an hour the army plane took off into the night. At seven o'clock they were circling over Wilmington. The city had not been disturbed. For an hour they flew back and forth before they landed. Startling news awaited them. At six that morning an earthquake had struck Wilmington, North Carolina. Half the town had sunk into the earth. Dr. Bird struck his brow with his clenched fist.

"Score one for the enemy," he said grimly. "We were too sure of ourselves, Carnes. We should have realized that he would hardly be so far north yet. Well, I've got to use the telephone while we're refueling."

Within an hour after landing they were again in the

air One o'clock found them over the stricken city. Dr. Bird wasted no time on Wilmington but headed north along the coast. For a hundred miles he skirted the shore, two miles out. With an exclamation of disappointment he ordered the pilot to turn the plane and retrace his route southward, keeping ten miles from the shore. Fifty miles south he ordered the plane further out and again turned north. From time to time they passed a ship of the air patrol which was steadily skirting the coast, but none of them had seen a submarine. Off Cape Hatteras the pilot asked for orders.

"The gas is running low. Doctor," he said. "I think we had better put in somewhere and refuel. If we are going to keep the air much longer, you had better get a relief pilot. I have been flying for thirty hours out of the last thirty-six and I'm about done."

"Head back for Washington," said the doctor with a sigh. "I seem to have gone off on a false scent."

At Cape Charles the pilot swung east over Chesapeake Bay. Hardly had he turned than Dr. Bird

gave a cry. Excitedly he pointed toward the water. Carnes grasped a pair of binoculars and looked in the direction Dr. Bird was indicating. Sliding along under the water was a long cigar-shaped shadow.

"It's a submarine!" exclaimed Carnes. "Is it a navy ship or the one we're after?"

"It's no navy sub," said the doctor positively. "It's not the right shape. Look at that bump on the side!"

The symmetry of the craft was marred by a huge projection on one side that could not be explained by the pattern of any known type of under-water craft.

"He's towing the borer!" cried the doctor in exultation. He took up the speaking tube. "Turn back to sea!" he cried. "We passed four destroyers less than ten miles out. We want to get in touch with them."

The plane roared out to sea while Dr. Bird feverishly sounded the "Alnav" call on the radio sending set. In a few minutes an answer came. From their point of

vantage they could see flags break out at the peak of the destroyer leader. The four ships turned into column formation and stormed at full speed into the bay. The plane raced ahead to guide them.

"We've got him this time, Doctor!" cried Carnes in exultation. He pointed to the bay below where the submarine was still making its way slowly forward. Dr. Bird shook his head.

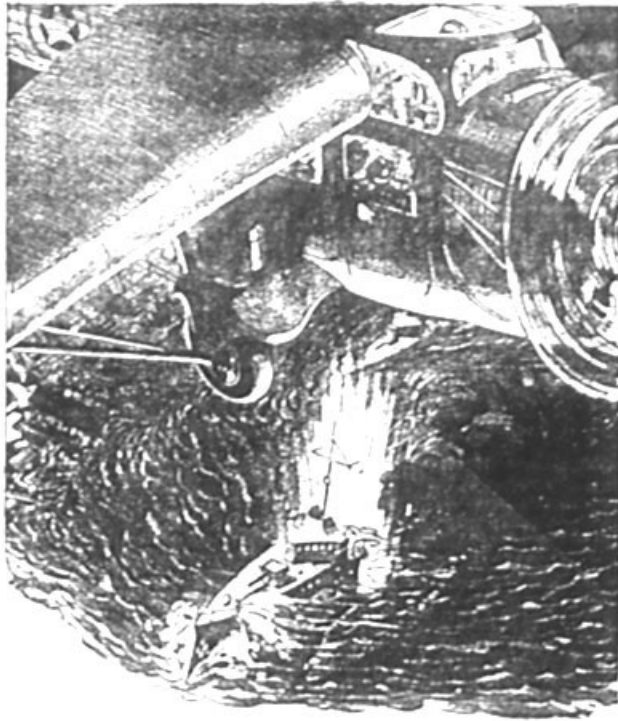
"I hope so," he said, "but I have my doubts. Saranoff is no fool. He wouldn't walk into a trap like this unless he had some means of escape. Here comes the first destroyer. We'll soon know the truth."

With the radio set he directed the oncoming boat. The destroyer reduced to half speed and changed direction slightly. From side to side she maneuvered until she was less than half a mile behind the submarine and headed straight for it. Dr. Bird tapped a few words on his key. With a belch of smoke, the destroyer lurched forward. She cut the waters with her sharp bow, throwing up a wave higher than her decks. Dr. Bird watched anxiously.

The destroyer was almost over the submarine and Dr. Bird's fingers trembled on the key. One word from him would send a half dozen depth charges into the water. On came the destroyer until it was directly over the underseas craft. Dr. Bird pounded his key rapidly.

"Good Lord!" cried Carnes.

From the bump on the side of the submarine came a flash of red light. The destroyer staggered for a moment, and the entire central section of the ill-fated ship disappeared. The bow and stern came together with a rush and went down in a swirling maelstrom of water. The plane lurched in the air as a thundering crash rose from the sea.



The second destroyer, in no way daunted by the fate of her colleague, rushed to the attack. Dr. Bird pounded his key frantically in an attempt to turn her back. His message was too late or was misunderstood. Straight over the submarine went the second ship. Again came the red flash. The forward half of the destroyer disappeared and the stern slid down into a huge hole which had opened in the water.

"He's invulnerable!" cried the doctor. He pounded his key with feverish rapidity. The two remaining destroyers slackened speed and veered off. Slowly, as

though loath to turn their backs on the enemy, they headed out for the broad Atlantic and comparative safety.

The submarine went slowly on her way. She did not turn west at the mouth of the Potomac but continued on up the bay. As long as there was light enough, the doctor's plane kept above her but the fading light soon made it impossible to see her. When she had disappeared from view, the doctor reluctantly gave the word to return to Washington.

"Where do you suppose he will attack next, Doctor?" asked Carnes when they sat again in the doctor's private laboratory.

"Washington, of course," said Dr. Bird absently as he looked up from a pile of telegrams he was running through.

"Why Washington?"

"Use your head. Representatives of every civilized power are in Washington now at the President's

invitation to consider means of halting the anti-religious activities of the Soviets. The destruction of the city and the killing of these men would be a telling blow for Russia to strike."

"But, Doctor, you don't think—"

"Excuse me, Carnes; that will keep. Let me read these telegrams."

For half an hour silence reigned in the laboratory. Dr. Bird laid down the last message with a sigh.

"Carnes," he said, "I'm check-mated. I sent out a hundred ultra-sensitive short wave receivers yesterday. Four of them were located within fifty miles of Wilmington, North Carolina. One of these four was destroyed, but none of the others detected a sign of a wave during the attack. One of them was within a hundred feet of the edge of the hole. If he isn't using a ray of some sort, what on earth is he using?"

"It looked like a flash of red light when it came from

the submarine."

"Yes, but it couldn't be light. Let me think."

The doctor sat for a few minutes with corrugated brows. Suddenly he sprang to his feet.

"I deserve to be beaten," he cried. "Why didn't I think of that possibility before?"

He hurried into his laboratory and brought out a small box with a glass front. From the top projected a spike topped with a ball. Through the glass, Carnes could see a thin sheet of metal hanging pendant from the spike.

"An electroscope," explained the doctor. "That sheet of metal is really two sheets of gold-leaf, at present stuck together. If I rub a piece of hard rubber with a woolen cloth, the rod will become charged with static electricity. If I then touch the ball with it, the charge is transferred to the electroscope and causes the two sheets of gold-leaf to stand apart at an angle. Watch me."

He took a hard rubber rod and rubbed it briskly on his coat sleeve. As he touched the ball of the electroscope the sheets of gold-leaf separated and stood apart at a right angle.

"As long as the air remains non-conducting, the two bits of gold-leaf will hold that position. The air, however, is not a perfect insulator and the charge will gradually leak off. If I bring a bit of radioactive substance, for instance, pitchblende, near the electroscope, the charge will leak rapidly. Do you understand?"

"Yes, but how is that going to help us?"

"Saranoff is accomplishing his result by artificially compressing the atoms. It is inevitable that he will do it imperfectly, and some electrons will be loosened and escape. These electrons, traveling up through the earth will make the air conducting. To-morrow we will have a means of locating the borer under ground."

"Once you locate it, how will you fight it?"

"That is the problem I must work out to-night."

"Could we bury a charge of explosive and blow it up?"

"Ordinary explosives would be useless," the doctor answered. "They would react in the same manner as other substances, and would be rendered harmless. Radite might do the work if it could be placed in the path, but it couldn't be. We may locate the position and depth of the borer, but long before we could dig and blast a hole deep enough to place a charge of radite before it, it would have passed on or changed direction. No, Carnes, old dear, the only solution that I can see is to turn his own guns on him. If I can, before morning, duplicate his device, we can train it on the spot where he is and reduce him and his machine to a pinch of yellow powder."

"Can you do it, Doctor?"

"What one man's brain can device, another man's brain can duplicate. The only question is that of time. I am confident that Saranoff will attack Washington to-morrow. If I can do the job to-night, we may save

the city. If not—At any rate, Carnes, your job will be to see that the President and all of the heads of the government are out of the city by morning. The President may refuse to leave. Knowing him as I do, I rather expect he will."

"In that case, the issue is in the hands of the gods. Now get out of here. I want to work. Report back at daybreak with a car."

Dr. Bird turned back to his laboratory.

"He must be using a ray of some sort, possibly a radium emanation," he muttered to himself. "That would have no wave motion and might accomplish the result, although I would expect the exact opposite from it. The first thing to do is to examine that powder with a spectroscope and see if I can get a clue to the electronic arrangement."

When Carnes arrived at the Bureau of Standards at dawn he rubbed his eyes in astonishment. The buildings were lighted up and the grounds swarmed with workmen. Before the buildings were lined up a

dozen trucks and twice that many touring cars. A cordon of police held back the curious. Carnes' gold badge won him an entrance and he hurried up the stairs to Dr. Bird's laboratory. The doctor's face was drawn and haggard, but his eyes glowed with a feverish light. Workmen were carrying down huge boxes.

"What's up, Doctor?" demanded the detective.

"Oh, you got here at last, did you? You're just in time. If you'd been fifteen minutes later, you would have found us gone."

"Gone where?"

"Out into Maryland in an attempt to stop Saranoff in his progress toward Washington."

"Have you found your means of combating him?"

"I hope so, although it is not what I started out to get. Did you bring a car as I told you?"

"It's waiting below."

"Good enough. I'll go in it. Williams, are those projectors all loaded?"

"Yes, Dr. Bird. The magnet will be ready to go in five minutes. The electroscopes and the other light stuff are all loaded and ready to move."

"You have done well. I'll let you bring the trucks and heavy equipment while I go ahead with the instruments. Take the road out toward Upper Marlboro. If I don't meet you before, stop there for orders."

"Very well, Doctor."

"Come on, Carnes, let's go."

He raced down the stairs with the detective at his heels. He went along the line of touring cars and spoke briefly to the drivers. He climbed into the car which Carnes had brought. As it started the other cars fell in behind it. At a speed of forty miles an hour,

with a detachment of motorcycle police leading the van, the cavalcade rolled out through the deserted streets of Washington. Once clear of the city, the speed was increased.

"Did you persuade the President to leave?" asked the doctor.

"There wasn't a chance. The papers panned him so much for following my advice at Charleston that he has turned stubborn. He says that if all the forces of the government can't protect him against one man, he is willing to die."

"We've got to save him," said Dr. Bird grimly. "Hello, there's the Chesapeake ahead."

The doctor studied the country.

"We are about opposite the place where we left that sub last night. I fancy that Saranoff will operate from there, for it didn't move during the last half hour we watched it. We'll go back inland a mile or two and spread out. I have no idea how far his radiations will

affect the electroscopes, but we'll try four hundred-yard intervals to start. That will enable us to cover a line twelve miles long."

He picked up a megaphone and spoke to the line of cars behind him.

"Take up four hundred yard intervals when we spread out," he said. "Every man keep his headphone on and listen for orders. Follow my car until it stops, then turn north and south and drop your men at intervals."

He reentered the car and led the way back for two miles. He halted his car at a crossroad. The cars following him turned and went to the north and south. Besides Carnes and the doctor, the car held two men from the Bureau. As they climbed out, Carnes saw that one of them carried a portable radio sending set, while the other bore an electroscope and a rubber rod. The radio operator set up his device, while the other man rubbed his coat sleeve briskly with the hard rubber and then touched the ball of the electroscope with it. The two bits of gold-leaf spread out.

"While we're waiting, I'll explain something of this to you, Carnes," said the doctor. "At four hundred-yard intervals are men with electroscopes like this one. My attempt to locate Saranoff by means of wave detectors was a failure. That proved that the ray he was using is not of the wave type. The other common ray is the cathode ray type which does not consist of vibrations but of a stream of electrons, negative particles of electricity, traveling in straight lines of high velocity. He must be knocking loose some of the electrons when he collapses the atoms. The rate of discharge of these electroscopes will give us a clue to the nearness of his device."

"Once you locate him, how do you propose to attack him?"

"The obvious method, that of using his own ray against him, fell down. However, in attempting to produce it, I stumbled on another weapon which may be equally effective. I am going to try to use an exact opposite of his ray. The cathode ray, when properly used, will bombard the atoms and knock electrons loose. I perfected last night a device on which I have

been working for months. It is a super-cathode ray. I tested it on the yellow powder and find that I can successfully reverse Saranoff's process. He can contract matter together until it occupies less than one one-thousandth of its original volume. My ray will destroy this effect and restore matter to something like its original condition."

"And the effect will be?"

"Use your imagination. He blasts out a hole by condensing the rock to a pinch of yellow powder. He moves forward into the hole he has made. I come along and reverse his process. The yellow powder expands to its original volume and the hole he has made ceases to exist. What must happen to the foreign body which had been introduced into the hole that is no longer a hole?"

Carnes whistled.

"At any rate, I hope that I am never in a hole when that happens."

"And I devoutly hope that Saranoff is. I met with one difficulty. My ray will not penetrate the depth of solid rock which separates his borer from the surface."

"Then how will you reach him to crush him? You don't expect to drill down ahead of him?"

"That is my stroke of genius, Carnes. I am going to make him bore the hole down which my ray will travel to accomplish his destruction. The cathode ray and rays of that type—"

"Pardon me, Doctor," interrupted the radio operator. "I have just received a message from the squadron leader of the planes patrolling the bay. He states that every inch of the Chesapeake Bay and the Potomac River have been examined and no submarine is visible."

"I expected that. He will have opened a cavern under the earth, in which his craft is safe from aerial observation. Once the borer has left it, it is invulnerable no longer."

"What reply shall I make?"

"Tell him to keep up a constant patrol. Three navy subs with radite-charged torpedos are on their way up the bay, together with half a dozen destroyers. The subs will scout for such a hole as I have described and will attack his sub if they find it. The destroyers will stand by and support them."

The operator turned to his instrument. The electroscope observer claimed the doctor's attention.

"There is a steady leak here, Doctor," he said. "I get a discharge in eleven minutes."

"Probably a result of his work in opening the hiding place for his submarine last night. Keep it charged, Jones."

"What did you say about the cathode ray, Doctor?" asked Carnes.

"The cathode ray? Oh, yes. I said that rays of that type were attracted by—Hello, look there!"

From a point a mile to the north a ball of red fire streaked up into the air. A moment later similar signals rose from other watchers in the line.

"It works, Carnes!" cried the doctor as he rushed for the car. "We've got him this time!"

The car raced along the road. At the first man who had signalled, it slackened speed. The doctor leaned out.

"What is your discharge rate?" he called.

"Eight minutes. Doctor."

The car rolled on. Dr. Bird repeated the question at the next post and was told that the electroscope there was losing its charge in seven minutes. The next man reported four minutes and the next man, one minute. The following station reported three minutes.

"It's right along here somewhere!" cried the doctor. "Summon everyone to this point and take up twenty-yard intervals."

From the north and south the cars came racing in. The instruments were spread out along a new line twenty yards apart. As the borer was located the intervals were decreased to fifteen feet. Dr. Bird thrust a long white rod into the ground.

"His path lies under here," he said. "Into the cars and go back a mile and test again."

The borer was making slow progress, and it was half an hour before Dr. Bird drove the second stake in the ground. With a transit he took the bearing of the path and laid it out on a large scale map.

"We'll stop him between Marr and Ritchie," he announced. "Jones, I am going back and set up my apparatus. Keep track of his movements. If he changes direction, let me know at once."

The doctor's car tore off to the west. Near Upper Marlboro, he met the convoy of trucks and led them to the selected spot. The trucks were unloaded and the apparatus laid out. Attached to a huge transformer were a dozen strange-looking projectors.

What puzzled Carnes most was a huge built-up steel bar wound about with heavy cable. Dr. Bird had this bar erected on a truck and located it with great exactness. The projectors were set up in a battery just east of the bar.

"How about power?" asked the doctor.

"We'll have it in five minutes," replied one of the men.

"A power transmission line carrying twenty-two thousand passes within two hundred yards of here. We are phoning now to have the power cut off. As soon as the line is dead we'll cut it and bring the ends here."

The electrician was good at his word. In five minutes the power line had been cut and cables spliced to the ends. The cables were brought to the doctor's apparatus and the main lines were rigged to the ends of the cable wound around the bar. In parallel on taps, the projectors were connected. Huge oil-switches were placed in both lines.

"All ready, Doctor," reported the electrician.

"Good work, Avent. He'll be here soon, I fancy."

A car whirled up and a man leaped out with a surveyor's rod. He set it up on the ground while a companion watched through binoculars. He moved it a hundred yards to the north and then back twenty. When he was satisfied he turned to Dr. Bird.

"The direction of movement has not changed," he said. "The path will pass under this stake."

Under the doctor's supervision, the truck carrying the bar moved forward until it stood over the surveyor's stake. The battery of projectors moved to a new location a few feet east of the rod. Other cars came racing up.

"He's less than half a mile away, Doctor!" cried Jones.

"Get your electroscopes out and spot him a hundred yards from this truck."

"Very well, Doctor."

The men with the instruments spread out along the path of the borer. Briskly they rubbed their sleeves with the rubber rods and charged their instruments. Almost as fast as they charged them, the tiny bits of gold-leaf collapsed together. Presently the man on the end of the line shouted.

"Maximum discharge!" he cried.

Dr. Bird looked around. Every man stood ready at his post. The next man signalled that the borer was under him. Carnes felt himself trembling. He did not know what the doctor was about to do, but he felt that the fate of America hung in the balance. Whether it remained free or became the slave of Soviet Russia would quickly be decided.

Slowly the borer made its way forward. With a pale face, Jones signalled the news that it had reached the point the doctor had indicated. Dr. Bird raised his hand.

"Power!" he cried.

The electrician closed a switch and power surged through the cables around the bar. The earth rocked and quivered. A hundred yards east of the bar a flash of intolerable red light sprang from the ground with a roar like that of Niagara. Toward the bar it moved with gathering momentum.

"Back, everyone!" roared Dr. Bird.

The men sprang back. The searing ray approached the bar. It touched it, and bar and truck disappeared into thin air. A splutter of sparks came from the severed ends of the wire. The ray disappeared. Carnes rubbed his eyes. Where the truck had rested on solid ground was now a gaping wound in the earth.

"Projector forward!" cried the doctor. "Hurry, men!"

The trucks bearing the battery of projectors moved forward until they were at the edge of the hole. Portable cranes swung the lamps out, and men swarmed over them. The projectors were pointed down the hole. Carnes joined the doctor in peering down. A hundred yards below them the terrible ray

was blazing. As they watched, its end came in sight. The ray was being projected forward from the end of a black cigar-shaped machine which was slowly moving forward.

"That's your target, men!" cried the doctor. "Align on it and signal when you are ready!"

One by one the projector operators raised their hands in the signal of "ready." Still the doctor waited. Suddenly the forward movement of the black body ceased. The ray was stationary for a moment and then moved slowly upward. A terrific roaring came from the cavern.

"Projector switch!" roared the doctor, his heavy voice sounding over the tumult.

"Ready, sir!" a shrill voice answered.

"Power!"

From each of the projectors a dazzling green ray leaped forth as the switch was closed. There was a

crash like all the thunder of the universe. Before the astonished eyes of the detective, the hole closed. Not only did it close but the earth piled up until the trucks were overturned and the green rays blazed in all directions.

"Power off!" roared the doctor.

The switch was opened and the ray died out. Before them was a huge mound where a moment before had been a hole.

"You see, Carnes," said Dr. Bird with a wan smile. "I made him bore his own hole, as I promised."

"I saw it, but I don't understand. How did you do it?"

"Magnetism. Rays of the cathode type are deflected from their course by a magnet. His ray proved unusually susceptible, and I drew it toward a huge electro-magnet which I improvised. When the magnet was destroyed, the ray dropped back ... to its original ... direction. That's the end ... of Saranoff. That is ... I hope ... it is."

Dr. Bird's voice had grown slower and less distinct as he talked. As he said the last words, he slumped gently to the ground. Carnes sprang forward with a cry of alarm and bent over him.

"What's the matter, Doctor?" he demanded anxiously, shaking the scientist. Dr. Bird rallied for a moment.

"Sleep, old dear," he murmured. "Four days—no sleep. Go 'way, I'm ... going ... to ... sleep...."

86 When The Moon Turned Green by Hal K Wells

Outside his laboratory Bruce Dixon finds a world of living dead men—and above, in the sky, shines a weird green moon.

Aproximate word count: 8,200

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

It was nearly midnight when Bruce Dixon finished his labors and wearily rose from before the work-bench of his lonely mountain laboratory, located in an abandoned mine working in Southern Arizona.

He looked like some weirdly garbed monk of the Middle Ages as he stretched his tall, lithe figure. His head was completely swathed in a hood of lead-cloth, broken only by twin eyeholes of green glass. The hood merged into a long-sleeved tunic of the same fabric, while lead-cloth gauntlets covered his hands.

The lead-cloth costume was demanded by Dixon's work with radium compounds. The result of that work lay before him on the bench—a tiny lead capsule containing a pinhead lump of a substance which Dixon believed would utterly dwarf earth's most powerful explosives in its cataclysmic power.

So engrossed had Dixon been in the final stages of his work that for the last seventy-two hours he had literally lived there in his laboratory. It remained now only for him to step outside and test the effect of the little contact grenade, and at the same time get a badly needed taste of fresh air.

He set the safety catch on the little bomb and slipped it into his pocket. As he started for the door he threw back his hood, revealing the ruggedly good-looking face of a young man in the early thirties, with lines of weariness now etched deeply into the clean-cut features.

The moment that Dixon entered the short winding tunnel that led to the outer air he was vaguely aware that something was wrong. There was a strange and

intangibly sinister quality in the moonlight that streamed dimly into the winding passage. Even the cool night air itself seemed charged with a subtle aura of brooding evil.

Dixon reached the entrance and stepped out into the full radiance of the moonlight. He stopped abruptly and stared around him in utter amazement.

High in the eastern sky there rode the disc of a full moon, but it was a moon weirdly different from any that Dixon had ever seen before. This moon was a deep and baleful green; was glowing with a stark malignant fire like that which lurks in the blazing heart of a giant emerald! Bathed in the glow of the intense green rays, the desolate mountain landscape shone with a new and eery beauty.

Dixon took a dazed step forward. His foot thudded softly into a small feathered body there in the sparse grass, and he stooped to pick it up. It was a crested quail, with every muscle as stonily rigid as though the bird had been dead for hours. Yet Dixon, to his surprise, felt the slow faint beat of a pulse still in the

tiny body.

Then a dim group of unfamiliar objects down in the shadows of a small gully in front of him caught Dixon's eye. Tucking the body of the quail inside his tunic for later examination, he hurried down into the gully. A moment later he was standing by what had been the night camp of a prospector.

The prospector was still there, his rigid figure wrapped in a blanket, and his wide-open eyes staring sightlessly at the malignant green moon in the sky above. Dixon knelt to examine the stricken man's body. It showed the same mysterious condition as that of the quail, rigidly stiff in every muscle, yet with the slow pulse and respiration of life still faintly present.

Dixon found the prospector's horse and burro sprawled on the ground half a dozen yards away, both animals frozen in the same baffling condition of living death. Dixon's brain reeled as he tried to fathom the incredible calamity that had apparently overwhelmed the world while he had been hidden away in his subterranean laboratory. Then a new and terrible

thought assailed him.

If the grim effect of the baleful green rays was universal in its extent, what then of old Emil Crawford and his niece, Ruth Lawton? Crawford, an inventor like Dixon, had his laboratory in a valley some five miles away.

An abrupt chill went over Dixon's heart at the thought of Ruth Lawton's vivid Titian-haired beauty being forever stilled in the grip of that eery living death. He and Ruth had loved each other ever since they had first met.

Dixon broke into a run as he headed for a nearby ridge that looked out over the valley. His pulse hammered with unusual violence as he scrambled up the steep incline, and his muscles seemed to be tiring with strange rapidity. He had a vague feeling that the rays of that malignant green moon were beating directly into his brain, clouding his thoughts and draining his physical strength.

Gaining the crest of the ridge, he stopped aghast as

he looked down the valley toward Emil Crawford's place. Near the site of Crawford's laboratory home was an unearthly pyrotechnic display such as Dixon had never seen before. An area several hundred yards in diameter seemed one vivid welter of pulsing colors, with flashing lances of every hue crisscrossing in and through a great central cloud of ever-changing opalescence like a fiery aurora borealis gone mad.

Dixon fought back the ever-increasing lethargy that was benumbing his brain, and groped dazedly for a key to this new riddle. Was it some weird and colossal experiment of Emil Crawford's that was causing the green rays of death from a transformed moon, an experiment the earthly base of which was amid the seething play of blazing colors down there in the valley?

The theory seemed hardly a plausible one. As far as Dixon knew, Crawford's work had been confined almost entirely to a form of radio-propelled projectile for use in war-time against marauding planes.

Dixon shook his head forcibly in a vain effort to clear

the stupor that was sweeping over him. It was strange how the vivid rays of that malevolent green moon seemed to sear insidiously into one's brain, stifling thought as a swamp fog stifles the sunlight.

Then Dixon suddenly froze into stark immobility, staring with startled eyes at the base of a rocky crag thirty yards away. Something was lurking there in the green-black shadows—a great sprawling black shape of abysmal horror, with a single flaming opalescent eye fixed unwinkingly upon Dixon.

The next moment the vivid moon was suddenly obscured by drifting wisps of cloud. As the green light blurred to an emerald haze, the creature under the crag came slithering out toward Dixon.

He had a vague glimpse of a monster such as one should see only in nightmares—a huge loathesome spider-form with a bloated body as long as that of a man, and great sprawling legs that sent it half a dozen yards nearer Dixon in one effortless leap.

The onslaught proved too much for Dixon's morale,

half-dazed as he was by the green moon's paralyzing rays. With a low inarticulate cry of terror, he turned and ran, straining every muscle in a futile effort to distance the frightful thing that inexorably kept pace in the shadowy emerald gloom behind him.

Dixon's strength faded rapidly after his first wild sprint. Fifty yards more, and his faltering muscles failed him utterly. The dread rays of that grim green moon sapped his last faint powers of resistance. He staggered on for a few more painful steps then sprawled helplessly to the ground. His brain hovered momentarily upon the verge of complete unconsciousness.

Then he was suddenly aware of a fluttering struggle, inside his tunic where he had placed the body of the quail. A moment later and the bird wriggled free. It promptly spread its wings and flew away, apparently as vibrantly alive as before the mysterious paralysis had stricken it.

The incident brought a faint surge of hope to Dixon as he dimly realized the answer to at least part of the

green moon's riddle. The bird had recovered after being shielded in the lead-cloth of his tunic. That could only mean one thing—the menace of those green moon rays must in some unknown way be radioactive. If Dixon could only get the lead-cloth hood over his own head again he also might cheat the green doom.

He fumbled at the garment with fingers that seemed as stiff as wooden blocks. There was a long moment of agony when he feared that his effort had come too late. Then the hood finally slipped over his head just as utter oblivion claimed him.

Dixon came abruptly back to life with the dimly remembered echo of a woman's scream still ringing in his ears. For a moment he thought that he was awakening on his cot back in the laboratory after an unusually vivid and weird nightmare. Then the garish green moonlight around him brought swift realization that the incredible happenings of the night were grim reality.

The clouds were gone from the moon, leaving his

surroundings again clearly outlined in the flood of green light. Dixon lifted his head and cautiously searched the scene, but he could see no trace of the great spider-form that had pursued him.

Wondering curiously why the creature had abandoned the chase at the moment when victory was within its grasp, Dixon rose lithely to his feet. The protecting hood had brought a quick and complete recovery from the devastating effects of the green moon's rays. His muscles were again supple, and his brain once more functioned with clearness.

Then abruptly Dixon's blood froze as the sound of a woman's scream came again. The cry was that of a woman in the last extremity of terror, and Dixon knew with a terrible certainty that that woman was Ruth Lawton!

He raced toward the small ridge of rocks from behind which the sound had apparently come. A moment later he reached the scene, and stopped horror-stricken.

Three figures were there in a small rock-walled clearing. One was old Emil Crawford, sprawled unconscious on his side, the soft glow of a small white globe in a strange head-piece atop his gray hair shining eerily in the green moonlight.

Near Crawford's body loomed the giant spider-creature, and clutched firmly in the great claspers just under the monster's terrible fanged mouth was the slender body of Ruth Lawton. Merciful unconsciousness had apparently overwhelmed the girl now, for she lay supinely in the dread embrace, with eyes closed and lips silent.

As the monster dropped the girl's body to the ground and whirled to confront Dixon, for the first time he had a clear view of the thing in all its horror.



He shuddered in uncontrollable nausea. The incredible size of the creature was repellent enough, but it was the grisly head of the monstrosity that struck the final note of horror. That head was more than half human!

The fangs and other mouth parts were those of a giant tarantula, but these merged directly into the mutilated but unmistakable head of a man—with an aquiline nose, staring eyes, and a touseled mop of dirty brown hair. Resting on top of the head was a metallic head-piece similar to the one worn by Emil Crawford, but the small globe in this one blazed with

a fiery opalescence.

The creature crouched lower, with its legs twitching in obvious preparation for a spring. Dixon looked wildly about him for a possible weapon, but saw nothing. Then he suddenly remembered the little lead grenade in his pocket. The cataclysmic power of that little bomb should be more than a match for even this monster.

His fingers closed over the grenade just as the great spider's twitching legs straightened in a mighty effort that sent it hurtling through the air straight toward him.

Dixon dodged to one side with a swiftness that caused the monster to miss by a good yard. Dixon raced a dozen paces farther away, then whirled to face the great spider. The creature's legs began scuttling warily forward. It was to be no wild leap through the air this time, but a swift rush over the ground that Dixon would be powerless to evade.

Releasing the safety catch of the grenade, Dixon

hurled the tiny missile straight at the rock floor just under the feet of that vast misshapen creature. There was a vivid flash of blinding blue flame, then a terrific report. Dazed by the concussion, but unhurt, Dixon cautiously went over to investigate the result of the explosion.

One brief glance was enough. The hideous mass of shattered flesh sprawling there on the rocks would never again be a menace. The only thing that had escaped destruction in that shattering blast was the strange head-piece the thing had worn. Either the small shining globe was practically indestructible, or else it had been spared by some odd freak of the explosive, for it still blazed in baleful opalescence atop the shattered head.

Dixon hurried back to where Emil Crawford and Ruth Lawton lay. The girl's body was so rigidly inert that Dixon threw back his encumbering hood and knelt over her for a swift examination. His fears were quickly realized. Ruth was already a victim of the green moon's dread paralysis.

"Dixon! Bruce Dixon!"

Dixon turned at the call. Emil Crawford, his face drawn with pain, had struggled up on one elbow. The old man was obviously fighting off complete collapse by sheer will power.

"Dixon! Replace Ruth's shining head-piece at once!" Crawford gasped. "That will make her immune from the Green Death, and then we can—" The old man's voice swiftly faded away into silence as he again fainted.

Dixon hurriedly searched the scene and found Ruth's head-piece on the ground where it had apparently fallen in her first struggle with the giant spider, but the tiny white globe in the device was shattered and dark.

Despair gripped Dixon for a moment. Then he remembered the unbroken head-piece of the slain monster. True, the glow of its globe was opalescent instead of white, but it seemed to offer its wearer the same immunity to the green moon's rays.

He swiftly retrieved the head-piece from the spider-creature's body, and set the light metal framework in place on Ruth's auburn curls.

Results came with incredible quickness. The rigidity left Ruth's body immediately. Her breath came in fast-quickenings gasps, and her eyes fluttered open as Dixon knelt over her.

"It's Bruce, Ruth—Bruce Dixon," he said tenderly.
"Don't you know me, dear?"

But there was no trace of recognition in those wide-open blue eyes staring fixedly up at him. For a moment Ruth lay there with muscles strangely tense. Then with a lithe strength that was amazing she suddenly twisted free of the clasp of Dixon's arms and sprang to her feet.

The next minute Dixon gave ground, and he found himself battling for his very life. This was not the Ruth Lawton whom he had known and loved. This was a madwoman of savage menace, with soft lips writhing over white teeth in a jungle snarl, and blue

eyes that fairly glittered with unrestrained, insensate hate.

He tried to close with the maddened girl, but instantly regretted his rashness. Her slender body seemed imbued with the strength of a tigress as she sent slim fingers clawing at his throat. He tore himself free just in time. Dazed and shaken, he again gave ground before the fury of the girl's attack.

He could not bring himself to the point of actively fighting back, yet he knew that in another moment he would either have to mercilessly batter his beautiful adversary into helplessness or else be himself overcome. There was no middle course.

Then old Emil Crawford's voice came again as the old man rallied to consciousness for another brief moment.

"Bruce, the opal globe is a direct link to those devils themselves! Break it, Bruce, break it—for Ruth's sake as well as your own!"

Crawford had barely finished his gasped warning when Ruth again hurled herself forward upon Dixon with tapering fingers curved like talons as they sought his throat. Dixon swept her clutching hands aside with a desperate left-handed parry, then snatched wildly at the gleaming head-piece with his right hand.

The thing came away in his grasp, and in the same swift movement he savagely smashed it against the rocky wall beside him. Whatever the opalescent globe's eery powers might be, it was not indestructible. It shattered like a bursting bubble, its fire dying in a tiny cloud of particles that shimmered faintly for a moment, then was gone.

Again, the effect upon Ruth was almost instantaneous. Every trace of her insane fury vanished. She swayed dizzily and would have fallen had not Dixon caught her in his arms. For a moment she looked up into his face with eyes in which recognition now shone unmistakably. Then her eyelids slowly closed, and she again lapsed into unconsciousness.

Dixon looked over at Emil Crawford, and found that the old man had again collapsed. Dixon knew of but one thing to do with the stricken man and girl, and that was to take them to his laboratory. The laboratory, apparently insulated by veins of lead ore in the mountain surrounding it, was the one sure spot of refuge in this weird nightmare world of paralyzing lunar rays and prowling monsters.

Flinging his tunic over Ruth's head to shield her as much as possible from the moonlight, he carried her to the laboratory, then returned for Emil Crawford. Safe within the subterranean retreat with the old scientist, Dixon removed his encumbering lead costume and began doing what he could for the stricken pair.

Ruth was still unconscious, but the cataleptic rigidity was already nearly gone from her body, and her breathing was now the deep respiration of normal sleep.

Emil Crawford's condition was more serious. Not only was the old man's frail strength nearly exhausted, but

he was also badly wounded. His thin chest was seared by two great livid areas of burned flesh, the nature of which puzzled Dixon as he began to dress the injuries. They seemed of radioactive origin, yet in many ways they were unlike any radium burns that Dixon had ever seen.

While Dixon was working over him, Crawford stirred weakly and opened his eyes. He sighed in relief as he recognized his surroundings.

"Good boy, Bruce!" he commended wanly. "We are safe here among the insulating veins of lead ore in the mountain. This is where Ruth and I were trying to come after we escaped from those devils to-night. But, Bruce, how did you guess the radioactive nature of the Green Sickness in time to avoid falling a victim to it as soon as you left the shelter of your laboratory?"

"My escape was entirely luck," Dixon admitted grimly. "To-night I left my laboratory for the first time in three days. I found a world gone mad, with a strange green moon blazing down upon a land of living dead

men, and with marauding monsters hideous enough to have been spawned in the Pit itself. What in Heaven's name does it all mean?"

I am afraid that it means the end of the world, Bruce," Crawford answered quietly. "It was a little over forty-eight hours ago that the incredible event first happened. Without a moment's warning, the moon turned green! Hardly had the world's astronomers had time to speculate upon this amazing phenomenon before the Green Sickness struck—a pestilence of appalling deadliness that swept resistlessly in the path of those weird green rays. Wherever the green moon shone, every living creature succumbed with ghastly swiftness to the condition of living death that you have seen.

"Westward with the racing moon sped the Green Sickness, and nothing stayed its attack. The green rays pierced through buildings of wood, stone, and iron as though they did not exist. A doomed world had neither time nor opportunity to guess that lead was the one armor against those dread rays. To-night, Bruce, we are in all probability the only three human

beings on this planet who are not slumbering in the paralytic stupor of the Green Sickness.

"Ruth and I were stricken with the rest of the world," Crawford continued. "We recovered consciousness hours later to find ourselves captives in the Earth-camp of the invaders themselves. You probably saw the display of lights that marks their camp down in the valley a mile beyond my place. We have learned since that the space ship of the invaders dropped silently down into the valley the night before the moon turned green and established the camp as a sort of outpost and observatory. They left two of their number there as pioneers, then the rest of them departed in the space ship for their present post up near the moon.

"Ruth and I were revived only that the two invaders in the camp might question us regarding life on this planet. They have a science that is based upon principles as utterly strange and incomprehensible to us as ours probably is to them. They probed my brain with a thought machine. It was an apparatus that worked both ways. What knowledge they got from me

I do not know, but I do know that they unwittingly told me much in the bizarre and incredible mental pictures that the machine carried from their brains to mine.

"They are refugees. Bruce, from a planet that circled about the star that we know as Alpha Centauri, a star that is the nearest of all our stellar neighbors, being only four and a third light years distant. Their home planet was disrupted by a colossal engineering experiment of the Centaurians themselves, the only survivors being a group of fifty who escaped in a space ship just before the catastrophe.

"There were no other habitable planets in their own system, so in desperation these refugees sped out across the void to our solar system in the hope of finding a new home here. They reconnoitered our Earth secretly and found it ideal. But first they believed that they must conquer the life that already held this Earth. To do this, they struck with the Green Sickness.

"The rays that are turning the moon green emanate

from the space ship hovering up there some fifty thousand miles from the moon itself. The Centaurian's rays, blending with the sunlight striking the disc of the full moon, are intensified in some unknown way, then reflected across the quarter of a million miles to the Earth, to flood this planet with virulent radiance.

"The green moonlight is radioactive in nature, and overcomes animal life within a matter of fifteen minutes or less. The rays are most powerful when the moon is in the sky, but their effect continues even after it has set, because as long as the green moonlight strikes any part of the Earth's atmosphere the entire atmospheric envelope of the planet remains charged with the paralyzing radioactive influence.

"Earth's inhabitants are not dead. They are merely stupefied. If the green rays were to cease now, most of the victims of the Green Sickness would quickly recover with little permanent injury. But, Bruce, if that evil green moon blazes on for twenty-four hours more, the brain powers of Earth's millions will be forever shattered. So weakened will they be by then that recovery will be impossible even with the rays

shut off, and the entire planet will be populated only by mindless imbeciles, readily available material for the myriads of monstrous hybrids that the invaders will create to serve them.

“To-night you saw the hybrid that the invaders sent to recapture Ruth and me. It was a fit specimen of the grisly magic which those devils from outer space work with their uncanny surgery and growth-stimulating radioactive rays. The basic element of that monster was an ordinary tarantula spider, with its growth incredibly increased in a few short hours of intensive ray treatment in the Centaurian's camp. The half-head grafted to it was that of a human being. They always graft the brain cavity of a mammal to a hybrid—half heads of burros, horses, or even dogs, but preferably those of human beings. I think that they prefer to use as great a brain power as possible.

"The hybrids are controlled through the small opalescent globes on their heads, globes that are in direct tune with a huge master globe of opalescent fire in the invaders' camp. When Ruth attacked you after you placed the opal head-piece upon her head,

she was for the moment merely another of the invaders' servants blindly obeying the broadcast command to kill. The white globes that Ruth and I wore when we escaped from the camp were identical with those worn by the invaders themselves, being nothing more than harmless insulators against the effect of the green moonlight."

A sudden spasm of pain convulsed Crawford's face. Dixon sprang forward to aid him, but the old man rallied with an effort and weakly waved Dixon back.

"I'm all right, Bruce," he gasped. "My strength is nearly exhausted, that is all. Like a garrulous old fool I've worn myself out talking about everything but the one important subject. Bruce, have you developed that new and infinitely powerful explosive you were working on?"

"Yes," Dixon answered grimly. "I have an explosive right here in the laboratory that can easily blow the Centaurian's camp completely off the map."

Crawford shook his head impatiently. "Destroying the

camp would do no good. We must shatter the space ship itself if we are to extinguish those green rays in time to save our world."

"That is impossible if the space ship is hovering up there by the moon!" Dixon protested.

"No, it is not impossible," Crawford answered confidently. "I have a projectile in my laboratory that will not only hurtle across that great gap with incredible speed, but will also infallibly strike its target when it gets there. It is a projectile that is as irresistibly drawn by radio waves as steel is by a magnet, and it will speed as straight to the source of those waves as a bit of steel will to the magnet.

"The Centaurians in the space ship," Crawford continued, "are in constant communication with their camp through radio apparatus much like our own. If you can pack a powerful contact charge of your explosive in my projectile, I can guarantee that when the projectile is released it will flash out into space and score a direct hit against the walls of the space ship."

"I can pack the explosive in the projectile, all right," Dixon answered grimly. "We will need only a lump the size of an egg, and a small container of the heavy gas that activates it. The explosive itself is a radium compound that, when allowed to come in contact with the activating gas, becomes so unstable that any sharp blow will set it off in an explosion that in a matter of seconds releases the infinite quantities of energy usually released by radium over a period of at least twelve hundred years. The cataclysmic force of that explosion should be enough to wreck a small planet."

"Good!" Crawford commended weakly. "If you can only strike your blow to-night, Bruce, our world still has a chance. If only you—" The old man's voice suddenly failed. He sank back in utter collapse, his eyes closed and his last vestige of strength spent.

Knowing that the old man would probably remain in his sleep of complete exhaustion for hours, Dixon turned his attention to Ruth. To his surprise, he found her sitting up, apparently completely recovered.

"I'm quite all right again," she said reassuringly. "I've been listening to what Uncle told you. Go ahead and prepare your explosive, Bruce. I'll do what I can for Uncle while you're working."

Dixon donned his lead-cloth hood and tunic again and set to work. Ten minutes later he turned to Ruth with a slender foot-long cylinder of lead in his hand.

"Ruth, will this fit your Uncle's projectile?" he asked.

"Easily," she assured him. "But isn't it frightfully dangerous to carry in that form?"

"No, it's absolutely safe now, and will be safe until this stud is turned, releasing the activating gas from one compartment to mingle with the radium compound in the other section. Then the cylinder will become a bomb that any sharp jar will detonate."

"All right, let's go then," Ruth answered. "Have you any more of those lead clothes that I can wear? I could wear the globe head-piece that Uncle wore, but it would loom up in the dark like a searchlight."

Dixon did not protest Ruth's going with him. There was nothing further that could be done for Emil Crawford for hours and in the hazardous sally to Crawford's laboratory he knew that Ruth's cool courage and quick wits would at least double their chances for success in their desperate mission. He provided her with a reserve hood and tunic of lead cloth, then handed her a tiny leaden pellet.

"Keep this for a last resort," he told her. "It's a contact bomb that becomes ready to throw when this safety catch is snapped over. I wish we had a dozen of them, but that's the last capsule I had and there's no time to prepare more."

He fished a rusty old revolver out of a drawer, and placed it in his pocket. "I'll use this gun for a last resort weapon myself," he said. "The action only works about half the time, but it's the only firearm in the place."

The green moon was still high in the sky as Ruth and Dixon emerged from the tunnel, but it was already beginning to drop gradually down toward the west.

Dixon wheeled his disreputable flivver out of its nearby shed. With engine silent they started coasting down the rough winding road into the valley.

For nearly two miles they wound down the long grade. Then, just as they reached the valley floor they saw, far up among the rocks to the left of the road, the thing they had been dreading—the bobbing opalescent globe that marked the presence of one of the Centaurians' hideous hybrids. The shimmering globe paused for a moment, then came racing down toward them.

The need for secrecy was past. Dixon threw the car in gear and savagely pulled down the gas lever. With throttle wide open they hurtled around the perilous curves of the narrow road, but always in the rocks beside and above them they heard the scuttling progress of some huge, many-legged creature that constantly kept pace with them.

They had occasional glimpses of the thing. Its pale jointed body was some twenty feet in length, and had apparently been developed from that of a centipede,

with scores of racing legs that carried it with startling speed over the rocky terrain.

The flivver raced madly on toward the blaze of kaleidoscopic colors that marked the Centaurians' camp. Crawford's home loomed up now barely a hundred yards ahead.

As though sensing that its quarry was about to escape, the hybrid flashed a burst of speed that sent it on by the car for a full fifty yards, then down into the road directly in front, where it whirled to confront them. Dixon knew that he could never stop the car in the short gap separating them from that huge upreared figure, and to attempt swerving from the road upon either side was certain disaster.

He took the only remaining chance. With throttle wide open he sent the little car hurtling straight for the giant centipede. He threw his body in front of Ruth, to shield her as much as possible, just as they smashed squarely into the hybrid.

The impact was too much for even that monstrous

figure. It was hurled bodily from the road to crash upon the jagged rocks at the bottom of a thirty-foot gully. There it sprawled in a broken mass, too hopelessly shattered to ever rise again.

The flivver skidded momentarily, then crumpled to a full stop against the rocks at the side of the road. Dixon and Ruth scrambled from the wreckage and raced for Crawford's home, scarcely fifty yards ahead.

They entered the laboratory and Ruth went directly over to where the radio-projectile rested in a wall-rack. Dixon took the gleaming cylinder down to examine it. Tapering to a rounded point at the front end, it was nearly a yard long and about five inches in diameter.

"The mechanism inside the projectile is turned off now, of course," Ruth said. "If it were turned on, the projectile would have been on its way to the space ship long ago, for the radio waves are as strong here as at the Centaurians' camp."

The girl pointed to a small metal stud in the nose of

the projectile.

"When that is snapped over, it makes the contact that sets the magnetizing mechanism into action," she explained. "Then the projectile will go hurtling directly for the source of any radio waves within range. I don't know the nature of its mechanism. Uncle merely told me that it is the application of an entirely new principle of electricity."

Dixon laid the long projectile down on the workbench, and began packing his lead cylinder of explosive inside it. He had to release the lead cylinder's safety catch before closing the projectile, which made his work a thrillingly precarious one, for any sharp blow now would detonate the unstable mixture of gas and radium compound in one cataclysmic explosion.

He sighed in relief as he finally straightened up with the completed projectile held carefully in both hands.

"All we have to do now, Ruth," he said, "is step out from under this roof and snap that energizing stud.

Then this little package of destruction will be on its way to our Centaurian friends up there by that pestilential green moon."

Ruth stepped ahead to open the door for him. With the end of their task so near at hand, both forgot to be cautious.

Ruth threw the door open and took one step outside, then suddenly screamed in terror as her shoulders were encircled by a long snake-like object that came whipping down from some vast something that had been lurking just outside. Dixon tried to dodge back, but too late. Another great hairy tentacle came lashing around his shoulders, pinning his arms tightly and jerking him out of the doorway.

He had a swift vague glimpse of a hybrid looming there in the green moonlight—a tarantula hybrid that in size and horror dwarfed any of the frightful products of Centaurian science that he had yet seen.

Before Dixon had time to note any of the details of his assailant another tentacle curled around him, tearing

the projectile from his grasp. Then he was irresistibly drawn up toward that grisly head where Ruth's body was also suspended in one of the powerful tentacles. The next moment, bearing its burdens with amazing ease, the giant hybrid started off.

Dixon tried with all his strength to squirm free enough to get a hand upon the revolver in his pocket, but the constricting tentacle did not give for even an inch. The only result of his effort was to twist his hood to one side, leaving him as effectually blindfolded as though his head were in a sack.

Long minutes of swaying, pitching motion followed as the hybrid sped over the rocky ridges and gullies. It finally came to a halt, and for another minute or so Dixon was held there motionless in mid-air, dimly conscious of a subdued hum of activity all about him. Then he was gently lowered to the ground again.

While one tentacle still held him securely, another tore away his hood and tunic. Almost immediately the hood was replaced by one of the protective white globe devices. Dixon blinked for a moment in half-

blinded bewilderment as he got his first glimpse of the Earth-camp of the Centaurians.

The place, located on the smooth rock floor of a large natural basin, seemed a veritable cauldron of seething colors which rippled and blended in a dazzling maze of unearthly splendor. But Dixon forgot everything else in that weird camp as his startled gaze fell upon the creature standing directly in front of him.

He knew instinctively that the thing must be one of the Alpha Centaurians, for in its alien grotesqueness the figure was utterly dissimilar to anything ever seen upon Earth before.

Life upon the shattered planet of that far distant sun had apparently sprung from sources both crustacean and reptilian. The Centaurian stood barely five feet in height. Its bulky, box-like body was completely covered with a chitinous armor that gleamed pale yellowish green.

Two short powerful legs, scaled like those of a lizard,

ended in feet that resembled degenerated talons. Two pairs of slender arms emanated from the creature's shoulders, with their many-jointed flexible length ending in delicate three-pronged hands.

The scaly hairless head beneath the Centaurian's white globe device bore a face that was blankly hideous. Two great lidless eyes, devoid of both pupils and whites, stared unblinkingly at Dixon like twin blobs of red-black jelly. A toothless loose-lipped mouth slavered beneath.

Dixon averted his gaze from the horror of that fearful alien face, and looked anxiously around for Ruth. He saw her almost at once, over at his right. She was tethered by a light metallic rope that ran from her waist to one of the metal beams supporting the great shimmering ball of opalescent fire which formed the central control of the hybrids.

One of the white globe devices had been placed upon Ruth's head and she was apparently unhurt, for she pluckily flashed a reassuring smile at Dixon.

Directly in front of Dixon and some forty yards away there was a large pen-like enclosure, with vari-colored shafts of radiance from banks of projectors constantly sweeping through it. Dixon drew in his breath sharply as he saw the frightful life lying dormant in that pen. It was a solid mass of hybrids—great loathesome figures fashioned from a score of different worms, insects, and spiders. The globes upon the gruesome mammalian half-heads were still dark and unfired with opalescence.

The invaders had apparently raided most of the surrounding country in obtaining those grafted half-heads. Near where Dixon stood there was a tragic little pile of articles taken from the Centaurians' victims—prospectors' picks, shovels, axes, and other tools.

Over to the left of the dormant hybrids stood the second Alpha Centaurian, curiously examining Dixon's projectile. The creature apparently suspected the deadly nature of the gleaming cylinder for it soon laid it carefully down and packed cushions of soft fabric around it to shield it from any possible shock.

Then at an unspoken command from the first Centaurian the great hybrid whirled Dixon around to face a small enclosure just behind him in which were located banks of control panels and other apparatus. One of the pieces of mechanism, with a regularly spaced stream of sparks snapping between two terminals, was apparently a radio receiver automatically recording the broadcast from the space ship. Dixon was unable to even guess the nature of the remaining apparatus.

"Bruce, be careful!" Ruth called in despairing warning. "He is going to put the thought-reading machine on your brain. Then he'll learn what the projectile is for, and everything will be lost!"

Dixon's mind raced with lightning speed in the face of this new danger. He stealthily slipped a hand over the revolver in his pocket. There was one vulnerable spot in the great hybrid holding him, and that was the opalescent globe on the creature's head. If he could only smash that globe with one well-directed shot, he might be able to elude the Centaurians for the precious minute necessary to send the projectile on

its deadly journey.

The hybrid began maneuvering Dixon toward the instrument enclosure. For a fleeting second the grip of the tentacles upon his shoulders loosened slightly. Dixon took instant advantage of it. Twisting himself free from the loosened tentacle in one mighty effort, he whirled and fired pointblank at the opalescent globe on the head looming above him.

The bullet smashed accurately home, shattering the globe like a bursting bubble. The great hybrid collapsed with startling suddenness, its life force instantly extinguished as the globe burst.

Dixon leaped to one side and swung the gun into line with the Centaurian's hideous face. He pulled the trigger—but there was no response. The rusty old firearm had hopelessly jammed.

Dixon savagely flung the revolver at the Centaurian. The creature tried to dodge, but the heavy gun struck its body a glancing blow. There was a slight spurt of body fluid as the chitinous armor was partly broken.

Dixon's heart leaped exultantly. No wonder these creatures had to create hybrids to fight for them. Their own bodies were as vulnerable as that of a soft-shelled crab!

The Centaurian quickly drew a slender tube of dark green from a scabbard in its belt. Dixon dodged back, looking wildly about him for a weapon. There was an ax in the pile only a few yards away. Dixon snatched the ax up, and whirled to give battle.

The other Centaurian had come hurrying over now to aid its mate. Dixon was effectually barred from attempting any progress toward the projectile by the two grotesque creatures as they stood alertly there beside each other with their green tubes menacing him. Dixon waited tensely at bay, remembering those searing radium burns upon Emil Crawford's body.

Then the first Centaurian abruptly leveled a second and smaller tube upon Dixon. A burst of yellow light flashed toward him, enveloping him in a cloud of pale radiance before he could dodge.

There was a faint plop as the protecting white globe upon his head was shattered. The yellow radiance swiftly faded, leaving Dixon unhurt, but he realized that the first round in the battle had been won decisively by the Centaurians. His only chance now, was to end the battle before the paralyzing rays of the green moon sapped his strength.

He warily advanced upon the Centaurians. Their green tubes swung into line and twin bolts of violet flame flashed toward him. He dodged, and the bolts missed by inches. Then Dixon nearly fell as his foot struck a bundle of cloth on the ground.

The next moment he snatched the bundle up with a cry of triumph. It was his lead-cloth tunic, torn and useless as a garment, but invaluable as a shield against the searing effects of those bolts of radioactive flame. He hurriedly wrapped the fabric in a rough bundle around his left forearm. The next time the tubes' violet flames flashed toward him he thrust his rude shield squarely into their path. There was a light tingling shock, and that was all. The bolts did not sear through.

With new confidence, Dixon boldly charged the two Centaurians. A weird battle ensued in the garishly lighted arena.

The effective range of the violet flashes was only about ten feet, and Dixon's muscular agility was far superior to that of his antagonists. By constant whirling and dodging he was able to either catch the violet bolts upon his shielded arm or else dodge them entirely.

Yet, in spite of the Centaurians' clumsy slowness, they maneuvered with a cool strategy that constantly kept the Earth man's superior strength at bay. Always as Dixon tried to close with one of them he was forced to retreat when a flanking attack from the other threatened his unprotected back. And always the Centaurians maneuvered to bar Dixon from attempting any dash toward the projectile.

The minutes passed, and Dixon felt his strength rapidly ebbing, both from his herculean exertions and from the paralyzing rays of the green moon beating down upon his unprotected head. As his speed of foot

lessened the Centaurians began inexorably pressing their advantage.

Dixon was no longer escaping unscathed. In spite of his frantic efforts to dodge, twice the violet bolts grazed his body in searing flashes of exquisite agony.

His muscles stiffened still more in the attack of the Green Sickness. Desperately dodging a Centaurian bolt, he stumbled and nearly fell. As he staggered to regain his balance, one of his antagonists scrambled to the coveted position behind him.

It was only Ruth's scream of warning that galvanized Dixon's numbed brain into action in time to meet the imminent peril.

In one mighty effort he flung his ax at the Centaurian in front of him. The heavy blade cut deep into the thinly armored body. Mortally wounded, the creature collapsed.

Dixon whirled and flung up his shielded left arm just in time to intercept the violet bolt of the other

Centaurian. Warily backing away, Dixon succeeded in retrieving his ax from beside the twitching body of the fallen invader.

Then, with the heavy weapon again in his hand, he remorselessly charged his remaining foe. The Centaurian's tube flashed in a veritable hail of hurtling violet bolts, but Dixon caught the flashes upon his shield and closed grimly in.

One final leap brought him to close quarters. The heavy ax whistled through the air in a single mighty stroke that cleft the Centaurian's frail body nearly in two.

Then Ruth's excited scream came again. "Bruce—the other one! Get it quick!"

Dixon turned. The wounded invader, taking advantage of their preoccupation in the final struggle with its mate, had dragged its crippled body over to the instrument enclosure. Dixon staggered toward it as fast as his half-paralyzed muscles would permit.

He was just too late. The Centaurian jerked a lever home a fraction of a second before Dixon's smashing ax forever ended his activities. The lever's action upon the pen of inert hybrids was immediate.

The sweeping lances of light vanished in a brief sheet of vivid flame which kindled the dark globes on the hybrids' gruesome heads to steady opalescence—and the dread horde came to life! Sprawling from the pen, they came scuttling toward Dixon in a surging flood—a scene out of a nightmare.

Dixon faced the oncoming horde in numb despair, knowing that his nearly-paralyzed body had no chance in flight. Then, just as the hybrids were nearly upon him, he heard Ruth's encouraging voice again.

"There's still one chance left, Bruce," she cried, "and I'll take it!"

Dixon turned. Ruth had in her hand the tiny contact grenade he had given her for a last emergency. She snapped the safety catch on the little bomb, then hurled it squarely at the giant opalescent globe

looming close beside her.

There was a terrific explosion and the great globe shattered to atoms. Apparently stunned by the concussion but otherwise unhurt, Ruth was flung clear of the wreckage.

With the shattering of the central globe the strange life force of the hybrid horde vanished instantly and completely. Midway in their rush they sprawled inert and dead, with their outstretched legs so close to Dixon that he had to step over one or two to get clear.

Dixon's brain reeled in the reaction of relief from the horde's hideous menace. Then he grimly fought to clear his fast-numbing senses long enough for the one final task that he knew must still be done.

The projectile, cushioned as it was, had escaped detonation in the blast. He had only to stagger across the twenty yards separating him from it, then release the stud that would send it flashing out into space.

But his last shred of reserve strength had nearly been

sapped now by the insidious rays of that malevolent green moon. Even as he started toward the projectile, he staggered and fell. Unable to drag himself to his feet again, he began grimly crawling with arms and legs as stiff and dead as that much stone.

Only ten more yards to go now. And now only five. Grimly, doggedly, with senses reeling and muscles nearly dead, the last survivor of a dying planet fought desperately on under the malignant rays of the vivid green moon!

One last sprawling convulsive effort—and Dixon had the projectile in his hands. His stiff fingers fumbled agonizingly with the activating stud. Then abruptly the stud snapped home. With a crescendo whistle of sundered air the projectile flashed upward into the western sky.

Dixon collapsed upon his back, his dimming eyes fixed upon the grim green moon. Minutes that seemed eternities dragged slowly by. Then his heart leaped in sudden hope. Had there really glowed a small blue spark up there beside the green moon—a spark

marking the mighty explosion of the radium bomb against the Centaurians' space ship?

A fraction of a second later, and doubt became glorious certainty. The vivid green of the moonlight vanished. The silvery white sheen of a normal moon again shone serenely up there in the western sky!

With the extinguishing of the dread green rays, new strength surged swiftly through Dixon's tired body. He arose and hurried over to where Ruth lay limp and still near the wreckage of the great globe. He worked over her for many anxious minutes before the normal flush of health returned to her white cheeks and her eyes slowly opened.

Then he took Ruth into his arms and for a long minute the two silently drank in the beauty of that radiant silver moon above them, while their hearts thrilled with a realization of the glorious miracle of awakening life that they knew must already be beginning to rejuvenate a stricken world.

87 The Death-Cloud by Nat Schachner and Arthur Leo Zagat

The epic exploit of one who worked in the dark and alone, behind the enemy lines, in the great Last War.

Aproximate word count: 11,300

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

We sat, Eric Bolton and I, at a parapet table atop the 200-story General Aviation Building. The efficient robot waiter of the Sky Club had cleared away the remnants of an epicurean meal. Only a bowl of golden fruit remained—globes of nectar picked in the citrus groves of California that morning.

My eye wandered over the scene spread before us, the vast piling of masonry that is New York. The dying beams of the setting sun glinted golden from the roofs of the pleasure palaces topping the soaring

structures. Lower, amid interlacing archings of the mid-air thoroughfares, darkness had already piled its blackness. Two thousand feet below, in the region of perpetual night, the green-blue factory lights flared.

On three sides, the unbroken serration of the Empire City's beehives stretched in a semicircle of twenty miles radius. Long since, the rivers that had made old Manhattan an island had been roofed over. But, to the east, the heaving sea still stretched its green expanse. On the horizon a vast cloud mountain billowed upward from the watery surface, white, and pink and many shades of violet.

"That's just the way it looked," Bolton muttered, as he drew my attention to the cloud mass. "See that airliner just diving into it? Just so I saw the New York—five thousand men—pride of the Air Service—dive into that mountain of smoke. And she never came out! Gone—like that!" And he snapped his fingers.

He fell silent again, gazing dreamily at the drifting rings of pipe smoke. He smiled, the twisted smile which was the sole indication that one side of his face

was the master work of a great surgeon-sculptor. A marvelous piece of work, that, but no less marvelous than the protean changes that Bolton himself could make in his appearance. It was this genius at impersonation that had won Bolton his commission in the Intelligence Service, when, in 1992, the world burst into flame.

"Would you like to hear about it?" The obtuseness of the man!

"If you'd care to tell me." I spoke off-handedly. This was like hunting birds on the wing: too abrupt a movement of the glider, and the game was lost.

This is the story he told me, in the low, modulated voice of the trained actor. He told it simply, with no dramatic tricks, no stressing, no climatic crescendos. But I saw the scenes he described, dodged with him through black caverns of dread, felt an icy hand clutch my heart as the Ferret stared at me with his baleful glance; was deafened, and stunned, and crushed by that final tremendous down pouring of the waters.

*I was standing—he began—on one of our rafts, watching the installation of a new ray machine. A storm was raging, but the great raft, a thousand feet long, and five hundred wide, was as steady as a rock. We were 700 miles out; the great push of '92, that drove us back to within 150 miles of our coast and almost ended the war, was still eleven weeks off.

Suddenly the buzzer of my radio-receiver whirled against my chest. "2—6—4"—my personal call. "2—2"—"Go to nearest communications booth." "A—4"—"Use Intelligence Service intermitter 4." The secret of that was known only to a half-dozen men in the field. Headquarters wanted to talk to me on a supremely important matter.

There was a booth only a short distance away. I stepped to it and identified myself to the guard. In a moment I was within and had swung shut and sealed the sound-proof door. I set the intermitter switches to the A—4 combination. Not even our own control officers could eavesdrop now. Then I switched off the light, and waited.

A green glow grew out of the darkness. I was being inspected. Headquarters was taking no chances. Out of the green haze before me the general himself materialized. I could count every hair in his grizzled beard. The little scar at the corner of his left eye fascinated me with its distinctness.

I saluted. "Captain Bolton reporting, sir."

"At ease!" General Sommers' voice snapped with military precision. The general was standing in his private office in Washington. I could see his desk in the corner, and the great operations map on the wall. There were new lines of worry in the general's grim face.

*He went straight to the point. "Captain Bolton, we are confronted with a problem that must be solved at once. While our information is meagre, the Staff is convinced that a great danger menaces us. Of its precise nature, or how it is to be combatted, we are unaware. I am assigning you to secure the answer to these two questions.

"A week ago there appeared, ten miles east of the enemies' first line, and directly opposite our raft 1264, what seemed at first to be merely a peculiar cloud formation. It rose directly from the surface of the water, and was shaped roughly like half an egg. The greatest dimension, lying along the water, parallel to the battle line, was about 5 miles; the height approximately a mile.

"When two or three days had passed, and no change in the shape or dimensions of the strange mass had taken place, although wind and weather conditions had been varied, we determined to investigate. This was undoubtedly an artificial, not a natural, phenomenon. It was then that we discovered that there was a concentration of defenses along this portion of the front. Our scouts were unable to find any of the usual gaps in either the ray network in the upper air, or the gyro-knife barrier beneath the surface. At the same time, from scouting parties and deserters at other points we learned that rumors are rife throughout the enemy forces of some scheme now on foot that will overwhelm us within a very short

time. No details have been given, but so widespread is the gossip, and so consistent, that we have been forced to the conclusion that it cannot be reasonably dismissed as mere morale-supporting propaganda.

"We have secretly developed a method of so equipping aircraft as to render them immune to the enemy death ray. The device is complicated and requires time to manufacture and install. After careful consideration, we decided that the situation was sufficiently grave to warrant revealing to the enemy our possession of this new device.

"The battle-airship New York has been equipped with the new protective equipment. To-morrow at sunrise she will make an attack in force on whatever lies behind that screen.

"Your orders are these. You will proceed at once to raft 1264. You will observe the attack made by the New York. If she fails, you will then find some way to enter that area, discover what is going on behind the screen, hamper or destroy the enemy plans if possible and report back to me personally."

The general's face suddenly softened. His tones lost their military precision. "I am afraid, Captain, that I am sending you to your death. But—we must know what is going on. If the New York fails, the task will appear impossible, but you have already done the impossible."

The grim mask dropped again over the chief's features; again he became the perfect military machine. "You will call on any officer of our forces for whatever you may need. Here is your authority." He stepped aside, and I heard the low burr of the tel-autograph at the side of the screen before me. A moment, and the general was again visible.

"That will be all." Once more the momentary softening. "Good luck, my boy." A final exchange of salutes, and the screen went blank.

I switched on the light. There in the little machine was a slip of paper. I extracted it. The lines of type, the scrawled signature, burned into my brain like letters of fire.

"To: All Officers of the Military Forces of the Americas.

Subject: Military Assistance. Eric Bolton, Captain M.I.S., M.F.A. is authorized to call upon you for any assistance. You will comply with his requests.

Alton Sommers, Lieut. General Commanding M.I.S., M.F.A.

By authority of the Commander in Chief."

In the corner appeared my thumb-print.

I stood there for a long time, mulling the thing over. The Staff was laying tremendous stress on the enemy's strange cloud formation, even to the extent of disclosing the secret of the new defensive device. The Easterners, too, had something novel, something that would cut off absolutely the transmission of ether waves. Nothing either side had yet produced would do that. What was happening behind that screen? Would they break through our defenses at last?

A vision arose before me. Hordes of yellow men, of black, of white renegades from the nations where the red flag waved dominant, pouring over the Americas. The horrors that Britain had undergone, the last European nation to hold out against the Red horde, flashed into my mind. I shuddered. Never. It must not be.

I was hurled from my feet by an electric shock. A great flood of sunlight burst in on me. A corner of the booth, three-foot concrete, had been sheared away, whiffed into nothingness! I arose and dashed into the open. A raid was in progress. The air was electric with the clashing of opposing barrages. The terrible silence of the pitched battles of that war oppressed me. I saw a squad, caught in the beam of an Eastern ray-projector, destroyed. The end man must have been just on the edge of the beams—half his right side lay twitching on the ground. The rest of him, and the seven others, were smoking heaps of blackened cinders.

High over No Man's Land—queer how those old phrases last—a covey of enemy helicopters hung,

waiting for the barrage to lift. A black hulk broke the surface of the water, split open: then another. Enemy sub-surface craft. The fight was being waged under water, too. A green mass spilled its contents as it leaped over the waves and fell back. One of ours.

A huge buzzing came from behind me. A cloud of wasplike forms flew high overhead. It was reserve aircraft, hurrying up from the second line raft, ten miles west.

But this was no affair of mine. I had my orders. I must be in the North Atlantic by daybreak. I looked around. There at the further edge my little Zephyr rested, intact. I hurried to her and sprang into the cockpit. I was off the coast of Chile. Twelve thousand feet would clear the highest range between. I set the height control. Today you don't have to do that, but Mason hadn't perfected his automatic elevator then. The starting indicator was already set for my position. I adjusted the direction disk. The little green light showed that the power broadcast was in operation. I snapped over the starting switch and the whirl of the helicopter vanes overhead told me all was well. The

machine leaped into the air. Nothing to do now till the warning bell told me I was within a hundred miles of my destination. The battle shot away from me, far below.

Darkness came swiftly. I was shooting into the eye of the sun at three hundred miles an hour. I swallowed a few pellets of concentrated food, then curled up in my bunk. There was no knowing how many hours would pass till I slept again.

I fell asleep at once.

The strident clamor of the alarm bell woke me. Dawn was just breaking. Far below me I could make out the heaving Atlantic, calm and peaceful. A long line of the huge second-line rafts just underneath, stretching north and south till it curved over the horizon. A bugle's clear notes came drifting up to me, reveille. Then I was hovering over my goal, raft 1264. The black rectangle was alive with activity unwonted at this early hour. I took over the controls from the mechanical pilot, sent my recognition signal and drifted downward.

The Zephyr settled on the raft with a soft hiss of the compressed air shock absorbers. A guard came hurrying up. My credentials passed upon, I alighted. Momentarily, it was getting brighter. I was just in time.

I looked eastward, toward the enemy rafts. Beyond them, there it was, just as General Sommers had described it—a mountain of vapor, gleaming white in the gathering light. Not at all disquieting; merely a shifting, billowing cloud mass. Rather pretty. The rest of the sky was clear, unspecked.

As I gazed a line of red fire ran around the edge of the cloud. A violet glow suffused the whole, faded swiftly into pink. The sun was rising. Behind me I heard a huge whirring. Turning, I saw her, just rising, all the beautiful trim length of her. The New York! Pride of our air fleet!

Fifty paces to my right a little knot of officers caught my attention. I recognized Jim Bradley. I remembered, someone had told me he was a major, and was commanding a raft. Good. Jim would work with me as

he had in the old days at Stanford U., when I coached the air polo team that he captained. I walked over.

Time for only a hurried handclasp. The signal corps sergeant, earphones clamped to his head, was intoning the airship's messages. "We have reached the thousand-foot level. Will now head for the objective. All well."

We watched her. She was through our barrage-line. A snapped order from Jim restored the barrier, momentarily lifted to let her pass. A curious shimmering blurred the ship's outlines. I called Jim's attention to it. "That's the new device, a network of fine wires, charged with neutralising vibrations. Worked like a charm in the tests. But there's no telling how effective it is in actual service."

A cold shiver ran up my spine. Many a fine ship I had seen strike that invisible network of rays, and puff into smoke. Was that to be the New York's fate?

"We are about to pass through the enemy barrage. All well," came the sergeant's unemotional monotone,

repeating the voice in his ears. I knew that voice was being listened to in Washington by a little group whose every shoulder bore the stars of high command. My thoughts flashed to them, gazing breathless at the screen that imaged the very scene before us.

My breath stopped. Now! She must be in it now. The next second would tell the tale. A faint coruscation of sparks ran along the network, but the craft kept steadily onward. Thank God!

"We have passed through the enemy first-line barrage. All well."

A faint whistling of released breath came from all about me. I was not the only one who had agonised at that moment. The first test had been passed; would the other be as successful?

"We are increasing our speed to the maximum. Objective dead ahead. All well."

I saw the ship fairly leap through the sky. Five

hundred miles an hour was her greatest speed.
Another moment—

"We are entering the cloud. Bow is invisible. All—"

She was in it. She lurched. Plunged forward. She was hidden. I turned to the sergeant. Tremendous concentration was on his bronzed face. He reached out, twirled a dial in the set before him, and shook his head slightly. Twirled again. We were knotted around him, our faces bloodless. He looked up. "The last sentence was cut off sharp, sir. I can hear nothing more. Even the carrier wave is dead."

Jim ripped out an oath, snatched the phones, and clamped them over his own ears. Dead silence.

At last he looked up. "Nothing, gentlemen."

We looked at each other, appalled.

Bradley handed the apparatus back to the sergeant. "Remain here, listening carefully. Let me know at once if you hear anything." The sergeant saluted.

Out there the white cloud billowed and gleamed in the sunlight. But there was something ominous in its calm beauty now.

A thought struck me. I spoke, and my voice sounded flat, dead. "Perhaps it's only the radio waves that are cut off. Maybe she's all right, fighting there inside, smashing them." But I knew that it was all over.

"God, I hope you're right. Five thousand men aboard her." Bradley's lips were white, his hands trembling. "Come to my office, Eric; we'll wait there. To your posts, gentlemen. Each of you will detail a man to watch that cloud bank, and report to me any change in its appearance, even the slightest."

We walked back to the concrete command-post. We didn't talk, though it had been years since we had seen each other. My brain was numbed, I know. I had seen plenty of fighting, watched many a man go to his death in the seven months since the war began. But this, somehow, was different.

An hour passed. Jim busied himself with routine paper

work. At least he had that relief. I paced about his tiny office. Already I was making plans. Force had failed. Strategy must take its place. I must get in there. But how?

Bradley looked up from his work, his face grim. "No news, Eric. If you were right we should have heard something from the New York by this time. They're gone, all right."

"Yes, they're gone," I answered. "It's up to me, then."

He stared in surprise. "Up to you? What do you mean?"

"Just that. I'm going in there, God helping." I made sure the room was shut tight against eavesdroppers. Then, briefly as I could, I told him of my orders, showing him the document I had received the day before. He shook his head.

"But it's impossible. Their ray network, and the undersea barrier, are absolutely solid here. I don't think even a mouse could get through. And even if

you did get behind their lines, how on earth are you going to get into the area underneath that devilish cloud. You saw what happened to the New York, protected as she was."

"Yes. I know all that. Nevertheless it's got to be done." Just then I got the glimmering of an idea. "Tell me, Jim, are they doing much scouting here. Undersea, I mean."

"The usual one-man shell, radio-propelled. We get one once in a while. Most of them, however, even if we do smash them, are pulled back on the wave before we can grab them. It's a bit easier than most places, though: our depth's only about six hundred feet."

"What! Why, I thought the bottom averaged three thousand all along the line."

"It does. But what would be a mountain ridge, if this were dry land, runs out from the mainland. We're over a big plateau here. It goes on east another twenty-five miles, or so. See, here's the chart."

A warning bell seemed to ring somewhere within me. Had this peculiar formation of the ocean bed anything to do with the problem at hand? But I kept to the immediate step. My plan was rapidly taking shape in my mind.

"What are the scouts—black, yellow, or—"

"Russians, mostly."

"Good. Now listen, Jim. Send down word that the next scout-sub that is caught is not to be ripped, but simply held against the attraction of the return wave. The television eye is to be smashed at once, and radio communication jammed. Can you do it as if something had happened to the shell?"

"Sure thing, but what's the big idea?"

"You'll see. I've worked the thing out now."

Just then a red light on Bradley's desk winked three times. "There's one between the lines now!" he exclaimed.

"Quick, man, shoot my orders down."

He pressed a yellow button and spoke quietly but emphatically into a mouth piece. "O.K. They understand."

"Now take me down."

He looked at me as if I had taken leave of my senses, but complied.

The door of the elevator that lowered us from the surface clanged open. We stepped out on a balcony that ran around a large, steel-lined room. The walls were dripping, and on the floor, twenty feet beneath, a black pool sloshed about with the heaving of the raft, in whose interior we were. Rubber-clad soldiers moved about in the blue glow of the globes sending down their heatless light from the ceiling. One sat at a desk near the elevator. As I spied him a green light glowed in front of him twice.

"They've got him, sir, bringing him in."

A low-toned order. The soldiers sprang to their post. A whirring signal. At the other end of the room the steel wall began to move upward, and water rushed in. A tremendous vibration shook the chamber: a ponderous thudding. The water rose to the level of the balcony and stopped. I looked at Bradley.

"We're beneath the surface, aren't we?" I asked. "How is it that the water doesn't fill the room?"

"Pumps," he replied. "Tremendous pumps that draw the water out just as fast as it comes in, and shoot it out again into the sea. We can maintain any desired level in here."

Then I noticed that the black flood was rushing by beneath me at a terrific rate.

Something bulked in the opening. Two tiny subs drew in, a black and a green. The steel wall rushed down again, and the vibration ceased. From the green craft heavy grapples extended, clutching the black, enemy scout. I saw a gaping hole in the black boat's nose, where its eye had been smashed.

Men were clambering over both vessels' hulls, tugging at the hatchway fastenings. The black one flew open. I leaped to the deck. Bradley after me, and jumped down into the hold.

In the little cubby-hole that was all the machinery left space for, a pale-faced form in green-gray crouched against the wall. His eyes stared in fear. A Russian, praise be. And not far from my size and build.

"Off with his clothes, quick!" I yelled, stripping mine as I spoke. Bradley looked at me queerly, and shrugged his shoulders. "Quick, man! Everything depends on speed!"

He shook his head, as one who listens to the vaporings of an imbecile, but turned to obey. I was standing there—naked, studying the Easterner's face, his body. No scars. Good.

*Jim turned to me, the prisoner's clothing in his hands. An exclamation burst from him. He looked back at the trembling Russ, then at me. "My God, Eric, how did you do it?" he asked.

I smiled. "All right, is it?"

"You're his twin; no, you're himself! If I'd had a drink to-day I'd be sure I was seeing double. How on earth—you had no make-up, no time—"

I was sliding into the Red's gear as I talked! "I've trained all the little muscles in my face—muscles you others don't even know you have. Started when I was a kid, then made a good living at it, acting. Comes in handy now, damn handy. I can make anything of my face, and hold it forever if I have to. Chink, Russ—anything. Distort my limbs too, and change my voice. That won't be necessary now. Simple, but it takes a lot of practice."

I was dressed by then, a counterpart of the enemy officer—I hoped. If I wasn't—well, I wouldn't live much longer.

"Now, out with the Russ and my clothes. Don't leave a bit, if you value my life."

A light of comprehension illumined Jim's face. "You're

going to pass yourself off as this man? You've got your nerve with you!" he exclaimed.

"Exactly." The cubby-hole was clear now. "Now take that spanner, and bang me over the head. Not too hard; I don't want a cracked skull, only a splashed scalp. Then pile me where it will seem I crashed against a projection of some kind when the grapples took hold. That bunk edge will do. Batten the hatch, and cast off the grapples. I hope their automatic control is still working, otherwise my scheme's gaflooey."

Jim stuck out his great paw. "Good luck, Eric," he said, simply. Then he clutched the spanner. I saw it go over my head....

Voices around me, harsh, guttural voices. Russian! By the Nine Dogs of War, I had pulled it off! But what were they saying? I was inside the lines, but was my deception successful? Or had my face relaxed with the shock of the blow? I thanked my Russian grandmother then for all the time she had spent teaching me her mother tongue.

"Boszhe moi, the poor fellow must have had an awful smash. He hasn't come to yet."

"The doctor will be here in a minute. He'll revive him."

I breathed a prayer of gratitude. They didn't suspect! But I didn't like this doctor business. Well, I'd have to stall through that as best I could.

I seemed to be lying on hard rock. I opened my eyes, staring blankly, straight up. A bearded face was bending over me, the captain's crossed sickles on the shoulder straps just within my vision. Behind, and above him, towering straight up—my God!—what was it? A green wall, a vertical green wall, going up and up! It looked like—but no: how could water stand straight up like that, for hundreds of feet?

I almost betrayed myself with a gasp! A dim bulk showed in the translucent depths of the wall. It rushed toward me, took form. A fish, a huge, blind fish, its cavernous mouth stretched wide. It came straight for me, just above. In a second it would leap

through. A scream of terror trembled in my throat. Then it hit the edge of the translucent green wall—and vanished! Was I dreaming? Had Jim hit me too hard?

Something stirred in the back of my mind. I sensed dimly that here lay the explanation of the disappearance of the New York, the very mystery that I had come to solve. Almost I had it; then it slipped away.

"Here's the doctor!" someone said. There was a little stir of activity about me. I allowed my eyes to close, as if in utter weariness.

"What's all this? What have you got here?" A gruff voice, intolerant.

"One of our sub-sea scouts, sir. Just come back, after some delay. Her eye was smashed, and there are grapple marks on her. Must have been caught, and then slipped away. She was leaking badly. We got her through the lock just in time." Jim had evidently added a few touches of his own. "Comrade Pauloff

seems to have been seriously injured. He's got a bad cut on his scalp, and was unconscious till a moment ago. Opened his eyes just as you came along."

"Hm. Let's see." I felt a none too gentle hand finger my wound. It throbbed maddeningly. The doctor spoke again. "A nasty crack, but no fracture. Here, you—wake up." I made no move. "Come on, wake up!" I heard the plop of a cork being drawn from a bottle; a pungent odor assailed my nostrils, choked me. I writhed, pulled at the hand holding the bottle to my nose and opened my eyes.

"That's better. How do you feel now?"

I raised a hand to my injury and muttered, in Russian. "Hurts, papashka." I kept my expression as blank, as uncomprehending, as I could.

The doctor flashed an understanding glance at the captain, then turned back to me. "What's your name?"

Memories of my grandmother's tales of her youth came flooding back to me. "Pavel, son of Pauloff."

It was the formula of the Russian student, in his teens.

"Your rank?"

"Second year. Petrovski Gymnasium."

The physician turned away. "No use bothering him now. A clear case of amnesia.

"He's been thrown back to his high school days. I've had a number of cases like that among your scouts lately." Blessed inspiration! "Only cure is rest. Get him over to the infirmary. We'll evacuate him to a base hospital to-morrow."

I was in a cool white bed, in a low ceilinged room, white painted. There were other beds, vacant. A uniformed male nurse puttered around. There was an elusive green tinge to the light that poured in through the one window.

The door opened and a sergeant came in. "Comrade Alexis!"

"Well, what is it now? Have they found another gold-bricking officer to mess up my clean beds?"

"A party from corps headquarters will be here in fifteen minutes for inspection."

"Let them come. They won't find any specks of rust on my instruments, like they did on Comrade Borisoff's."

"They'd better not. You know what happened to him."

"Yeah. Chucked into the ray. Well, he didn't give the burial squad any work." And the two laughed, a laugh that had more than a hint of sadistic cruelty in it. "If I had my way," the nurse went on, "I'd do the same with all these nuts that come back from the scout ships raving of home and mother. It's my idea that they're all bluffing. It's a good way to be shipped to the rear, where the captured dames are. Say, did I tell you about the last time I was on leave—"

The two whispered, their heads close together. My brain was working frantically. Things had gone well so far, but I had to get out of here before the morning, or

I'd be sent to the base and lose all that I had gained by my daring.

The door snapped open. "Smirnow!" (Atten-shun!)

I was on my side, facing away from the wall. I remained so, staring blankly across the room. I hoped the inspection would be over quickly. The fewer the enemy officers I had looking me over, the better. Someone back there was snapping questions. That voice—where had I heard it before?

"Your patient. What's his trouble?"

"Amnesia, sir. One of the scouts."

"Oh, yes. Let's look at him."

Someone was walking across the room, then standing above me. His hand was just at the level of my eyes—a hand with the little finger twisted queerly into the palm. I knew that hand: it was the Ferret's! A cold shiver ran up my back. I almost stopped breathing.

Of all the infernal luck in the world, to have the Ferret walk in here! He was chief of the Red's Intelligence Service, the shrewdest, sharpest, cruelest of them all. Many of our best men had gone west because of his uncanny instinct for piercing disguise. They said he could smell an American. And many of our most strictly guarded plans had been smashed through his infernally clever spying. Only a month before I had him in my clutches; saw the very rope around his neck. But he had slipped away, and left me empty-handed and kicking myself for an ass.

I held my breath as I felt those gimlet eyes of his boring into me. Would he sense who I was? Surely he could hear the pounding of my heart. How long he stood there I don't know. It seemed like hours. I tautened, waiting for him to call out, determined to sell my life as dearly as I could.

But for once the Ferret was fooled. He turned away. "Take us into your kitchen," he snapped at the nurse, then there was the tramping of feet and the slamming of a door.

The breath whistled from me in relief. I turned cautiously. I was alone. Now was my chance. I jumped from the bed and started toward the window. Once out, I'd find some place to hide. I let my face relax; there was no use for that particular disguise any longer. The window was up. I was on the sill. Another second and I'd be out in the open.

"Just where do you think you're going?" came the Ferret's silky, cruel voice. I whirled. There he was, just inside the door. His little black eyes glinted dangerously over his hooked nose and sharp chin.

"Oh—Bolton! Something made me turn back. Glad to see you."

His hand flashed to the ray-tube in his belt. At the same moment I left the window sill in a desperate leap. Clear across the room I sprang, and before he had time to pull his weapon I had one hand clamped around his wrist, the other clutching his throat. We crashed to the ground.

I was in pyjamas, barefooted, he fully clothed. His

leather shoes drove into me viciously, even as his face turned purple. The pain was excruciating, but I dared not cry out. His left thumb found my eye, was digging in.

The crash of our fall must have been heard outside; another moment and all would be lost. I was momentarily on top as we rolled across the floor. With a supreme effort I pulled his head away from the floor, then crashed it down. He slumped; lay still.

The door knob was turning as I jumped frantically through the window. I heard a cry behind me. Rough, uneven ground. No one about. To my right was a rocky cliff, and at its base what looked like the mouth of a cave. Any port in a storm: I dived into it.

It was a cave, all right, or rather a narrow tunnel winding some distance into the cliff. I ran back at top speed, till I crashed into the end of the passage.

I crouched there, panting. It was beastly cold, and the dampness struck into my bones. I shivered, then laughed grimly. I wouldn't shiver long. When the

Ferret came to and revealed that Eric Bolton was around, there wouldn't be a stone left unturned till I was found. Those birds had good cause to want me rubbed out.

Already I could hear faint shouts from without. The chase was on. I was caught, right enough. Trapped like any rat.

I felt around me in the darkness and my hand lighted on a round stone. It just fitted my fist. Well, I'd get one of them, anyway, when they found me. Cold comfort in that, but I didn't feel like giving in tamely.

Footsteps sounded out at the tunnel end. So soon! I gripped my rock tightly, and waited.

But—it sounded like only one man. I drew myself together. Maybe I had a chance. A dim glow showed where the passage curved, then a disk of light flashed on the wall and flitted about. The fool!

The steps came on, slowly, stumblingly. The disk of light grew smaller as its source drew nearer. Then he

was around the corner, bulked for a moment against his own light as it was reflected from the wet wall. That moment was enough! The stone left my hand with all the force I possessed. It went straight to its mark: a sickening thud told me that. The form dropped, and the flashlight clinked on the rocks.

I listened. Still the shouts from without, but no steps inside. I was safe for a time. But the searcher would surely be missed, and others would come looking for him. I had only one chance. I shrugged my shoulders. I couldn't lose anything. If I stayed here my goose was cooked.

By the light of the flashlight I examined my quarry. A renegade Frenchman, apparently. A private. In a trice I had his uniform on me and had twisted my features to match his. Little did I think when I acted under the Klieg lights that the fate of two continents would some day depend on this gift of mine.

He stirred; groaned. I hesitated. Then—well, I couldn't chance his crawling out. His ray-tube was newly charged. I left a heap of ashes there as I

walked away....

I was outside the cave. I darted a glance around. My refuge was not the only hole in sheer rock; it was literally honeycombed. From one, then another of the cavern mouths a soldier emerged. Each strode across the uneven, rocky plain to where an officer stood with what was apparently a map in his hand. As each searcher saluted and reported, the officer made a mark on the map. Someone came out from the cave-mouth next to mine. I fell in behind him.

"No one in cave twenty-one, sir."

"To your post."

The private turned on his heel and marched off to take his place in a company formation that was rapidly taking shape near by. My turn was next. What was the number of my cave? A mistake now, and I was through.

I saluted. "No one in cave twenty, sir."

"To your post."

Had I hit it? When the final check-up came would there be two reports for one cave, none for another?

A front rank man moved aside. Good: that meant my place was just behind him. My luck was holding. And never did a man need luck more!

Now was my first chance to look about, to discover what sort of place this was. It was an oval plain, roughly a mile wide by five miles long. Buildings, squat structures of corrugated iron, were scattered here and there. In the distance, to my left, what seemed a great hole in the ground glowed; a huge disk of light.

Dry land, here, where there should be nothing but a waste of waters!

Puzzled, I strained to see what bordered the plain. It was a tall cliff, running all around, and towering high in the air. But it wasn't rock, for it glowed strangely green in the flood of light that illumined the place.

And it was clean cut, rising sheer from the unevenness of the ground.

Then I remembered. The vertical green wall that soared above me as I lay dazed from Jim's blow. The translucent green wall in whose depths I had seen the blind fish rushing toward me. Water! The sea! Impossible! There were scientific miracle-workers in the enemy's ranks, but they couldn't have hollowed out a pit such as this in mid-ocean; forced back the very ocean to create this amphitheatre, this dry plain on the Atlantic's very bottom: held back the unthinkable weight of Earth's waters by a nothingness. Incredible!

Yet the accomplished fact stared me in the face.

My eyes traveled up that impossible wall. It must have been at least six hundred feet high. At its summit, in a murky haze that heaved and billowed, I made out strange, dim bulks that hung, unsupported. A long line of them, a long ellipse following closely the curving of the cliff. Underneath the nearest, barely perceptible, I could make out a lens-shaped

cage of wire. I began to understand.

Overarching everything was a great dome of heaving cloud.

"Smirn-ow!"

The long line snapped into immobility.

"By the left flank, march!"

We were moving, marching. Then my ruse had succeeded. I had chosen the right cave number. I breathed a sigh of relief.

The command for route order was given, and at once a buzz of talk broke out around me. "Damn them, they're sending us right off to work! We missed our mess, hunting for that damned spy. But that don't mean anything. It's back to the tunnel for ours."

"Oh, quit your bellyaching, Andreyeff. Another week, and we'll be in New York. Just think of it, the richest city in the world to loot! And women! Why, they tell

me the American women are to the Frenchies and the cold English-women as the sun is to the stars. What's a meal more or less when you think of that?"

An obscene laugh swept through the ranks. Guttural voices boasted of past exploits—black deeds and sadistic cruelties that had marked the trail of the hordes sweeping over Europe from the windy Asiatic steppes.

As we marched, I noticed a peculiarity of the rocky floor. There were no sharp edges, no sudden cleavages in the uneven terrain. It looked, for all the world, as though the stone had been melted, then frozen again in a moment. An unbelievable pattern was forming itself in my mind. If what I thought were true—!

The command came to halt.

We had reached the blazing disk I had seen from afar. It was a tremendous shaft, dropping straight into the very bowels of the earth. Two hundred feet across, a blinding glare streamed up from the pit. From far

beneath came shoutings, the clank of machinery, a growling roar.

Other companies marched up and halted at the pit edge. My outfit were whites—Russians, French, Germans. But the others were black, brown, yellow—all the motley aggregation of races that formed the Red cohorts, the backbone of the Great Uprising. As the "At ease" order snapped out a babel of tongues rose on the air. Every language of Earth was there save English. The Anglo-Saxons had chosen tortured death rather than submission to the commands of their conquerors.

A huge platform rose slowly up in the shaft and came to a stop at the ground level. It was solidly packed with another throng of soldiers in the gray-green of the enemy. They marched off and we took their place.

Down, down, we went, till it seemed that our destination was the center of the earth. Louder and louder grew the growling roar, the ponderous thud and clank of huge machines.

We were in a huge chamber, hollowed out of the solid rock. Thousands of men bustled out among great piles of lumber and steel rails. Huge cranes rolled here and there, swinging their ponderous loads. Officers shouted crisp orders. Green-uniformed privates sprang to obey.

But no time was given me to get more than a glimpse of all this activity. From out the gaping mouth of a hundred-foot-wide tunnel a long train of flat cars came gliding. It halted and swayed on the single rail, and the whir of the gyroscopic balancers filled the cavern. A sharp order, and my companions leaped for the cars, lay prone on the steel car-beds, and passed their belts through projecting loops. I wondered, but imitated them. I buried my face in my arms, as the others were doing.

There came the eery shriek of a siren: the train was moving. Swiftly it gathered speed till it seemed as though my protesting body was being forced through a wall of air grown suddenly solid. Myriad fingers pulled at me, seeking to hurl me to destruction. Even through my protecting arms my breath was forced

back into my lungs, choking me. The wind howled past with the wail of a thousand souls in torment.

Just as the limit of endurance was reached the terrific speed slackened, and the long train ground to a halt. "All off! Lively now!" came the command.

We were at the rail-head, and before me was the face of the tunnel. Queer, hooded figures were there bending over wheeled tripods, manipulating what appeared to be searchlights. But no shafts of light leaped from the lenses. The tripods were rolling steadily forward.

I looked at the tunnel face again, then, startled, back to the hooded men. I rubbed my eyes. Was I seeing things? No, by all that was holy, it was so! The distance between the machines and the end wall of the passage had not changed, but men and rock were ten—fifteen—twenty feet away! They were boring; boring into the solid rock at tremendous speed. And the rock was melting, vanishing, disappearing into nothingness in the awful blast projected from those machines!

I gaped—my pose, my danger, forgotten. Almost as fast as a man could run, the tunnel extended itself. It was phantasmal, incredible!

A rough hand seized me from behind. I whirled, my heart in my mouth. It was the burly sergeant. "What the hell are you dreaming about, Renaud? Hop to it. Over there, on that shoring job. Get busy now, or—" The threat in that unfinished sentence chilled me by its very vagueness.

My squad was hauling heavy timbers, setting them up where a fault showed in the rocky roof of the tunnel. I joined them but my thoughts were a madly whirling chaos.

The pattern was complete now. The long, curving under-water ridge on Jim's chart—this tunnel was boring through it. Whatever it was that those tripods projected—a new ray it must be—it was melting a passage six hundred miles long. Under our rafts, under our fleets, under our coast defenses—to come up far behind our lines. The ridge joined the coast just south of New York. Some night, while our generals

slept in smug complacency, all that gray green horde of wolves would belch forth—from the very earth.

And the Americans would follow Europe into hell!

Five minutes passed. I looked again at the face of the tunnel, drawn by an irresistible fascination. It had advanced a full quarter of a mile. Like fog before a cloud-piercing searchlight, the age-old rock was dissolving before the ray. At this rate America's doom would be sealed in a week. And I, alone among these thousands, was helpless to avert the climaxing menace.

A howl of rage came from the sergeant. I turned. A diminutive German, his face pale green with fatigue, had stumbled and fallen under the weight of a heavy timber.

The swarthy non-com was kicking him with a cruel boot. "Get up, you; get up before I brain you!"

The sprawling man looked up, fear staring from his deep-sunk eyes. "Aber, ich bin krank."—"I am sick; I

can't stand the work; it is too schwer, too heavy," he faltered.

"Sick?" the Russian roared. "Sick? I'll sick you! You're lazy, too damned lazy to do a little work. I'm tired of this gold-bricking around here. I'm going to make an example of you that the rest of you dogs won't forget in a hurry." His face was purple with rage. He bent, seized the fallen man and dragged him out from under the crushing bulk. Then, raising the struggling wretch over his head as lightly as though he were an infant, he ran forward, toward the ray projectors.

Shriek after shriek pierced the hot air, such howls of utter fear and agony, as I hope never to hear again. The little figure, held high in the huge paws, writhed and tossed, to no avail.

The sergeant reached the nearest tripod. His brawny arms flexed; straightened. The German swept up and over the head of the operator, and dropped in front of the machine. Then—he vanished. Nothing, absolutely nothing, was there between projector and rapidly retreating wall!

A horrible retching tore my stomach; I swayed dizzily. The utter brutality, the finality of the thing! "And any more of you carrion that I catch slacking will get the same thing," the Russian said. "You, Renaud, I've got my eye on you. Watch out!" The sergeant's voice rasped through the mist about me. I shoved my shoulder under one end of an eight by eight and plunged into the back breaking labor. But one thought hammered at my reeling brain: "The New York! That's what happened to her!"

The long hours of toil at last ended. We were again in the entrance cavern, waiting for the elevator platform. It was unaccountably delayed: the last batch had gone up fifteen minutes before. The men about me chafed and swore. They were impatient for mess and bed.

Bit by bit I had reconstructed all the elements of this unprecedented operation. The ray, the blasting ray that whiffed into non-existence all that it touched, was the keynote. The great plain had been cleared by the ray. The dim shapes floating high in that far-circling ellipse were pouring down the dreadful vibrations,

thus holding back the sea in a marvelous green wall. I remembered the sea-monster that had dashed at me and vanished. That proved it. The dome of cloud was camouflage, or the product of the processes of destruction going on underneath: it didn't matter. What mattered was that it was interlaced by a network of ray beams. It was an impenetrable wall, a perfect defense. Boxed in on all sides by such a barrier, how was I to get out word of the menace? How was it to be combatted even if our forces knew of the danger? A hundred plans flooded my wearied brain, to be rejected one by one.

A mocking, ribald cheer arose from the men around me. The platform was ascending. Why the long delay? A premonition of disaster chilled me. I shrugged it aside.

We were at the top. A long line of soldiers curved about the mouth of the pit. The next shift waiting to go down? No—they made no move to approach. And each one was holding his ray-tube at the ready. This was the guard. At a table nearby a knot of officers was gathered. Papers of some sort were piled high on

it. Again the icy finger of dread touched me. One of the officers moved aside, revealing the profile of his companion. The Ferret. Then I knew I was done for!

My eyes darted here and there, seeking escape. No hope—the heavily armed guard was all around; the platform blocked the shaft mouth. A dash would be self-betrayal—suicide.

Mechanically I obeyed the sergeant's barked commands. We were in single file. We were moving toward that ominous table where the Ferret stood, a sardonic smile on his sharp-featured face. I could make out a livid weal across his throat. I had left my mark on him. That was some satisfaction.

The head of the line reached the table. They were fingerprinting the leader! A lieutenant extracted a paper from the pile and handed it to the Ferret. He made momentary comparison of something on the paper with the mark the soldier had just made. Then the next man stepped up, while the first made off across the plain.

Of course! Simple: how very simple! And yet it had caught me! The service records of the men had their fingerprints, just as in our own forces. And each man in the area was being checked up. Trust the Ferret to think of that. He knew that I'd be somewhere in their ranks, impersonating one of their men. Well, I was in for it. The last trick in our long game was his.

My turn. No use going through the motions. I bent down a moment, then straightened. "Oh, hello, Bolton," the Ferret said, thrusting out his hand, the one with the twisted finger. I had resumed my own visage. "Didn't think you could get away with it, did you?"

Chagrined as I was, I put a good face on it. The Ferret and I had run up against each other many many times. Cheerfully, either of us would have cut the other's throat. But—we played the game.

"Hello, Rubinoff," I responded. "You seem to have me, just now. But try and hold me."

The Ferret threw back his head and laughed. "Oh, I

think you'll find it a little difficult to get away this time." I thought so, too, but did not voice my thought.

The smile left Rubinoff's face. He snapped an order. A squad advanced from the guard. Handcuffs clicked around my wrists, the mates of each were fastened to the arms of two guardsmen. I was securely chained. They were taking no chances.

"Take him to the special cell in the guard-house." The lieutenant saluted. I was marched off. Then I was not to be summarily executed. I was not as much relieved as you might think. You see, I knew the Ferret. We had raided one of his hangouts once; just missed him. But we found an M.I.S. man there whom Rubinoff had been—questioning. We thanked God when he died.

*We tramped across the plain. My eyes kept roving about: there wasn't much hope for me, but miracles have happened. Most of the scattered structures were hastily thrown together sheds of sheet iron. Barracks, they looked like. But, every so often I spied spheres of concrete, the wide open doors revealing yard-thick walls. What could be their purpose?

Something bothered me. Something about the ray projectors and the other machinery I had seen. I glanced up at one of the balloons floating high above. All these needed a power supply; tremendous power to accomplish what the ray was doing. And there were no cables running to them. How did the power get to them?

There was only one answer. Radio transmission. The required energy, perhaps the very ray vibrations themselves, were being broadcast to the points of projection. That meant a power-house and a control room somewhere in the area. The vulnerable points! Where were they?

I stumbled, and was jerked roughly to my feet. The lieutenant slapped me. "Scared, Americansky? You well may be. We'll have rare sport when they throw what the Ferret leaves of you into the ray." I shuddered. To go out that way! I'll be honest—I was horribly afraid. The men to whom I was shackled laughed.

A dull throbbing beat at my ears, a vibration just too

low to be sound. I looked about for its source. It came from my left—a concrete building, low lying, about a hundred yards long by as many feet wide. At the further end a squat smokestack broke the flat line of the roof. Guards, many guards, were pacing their slow patrol about it. From the center of the side nearest me, cables thick as a man's trunk issued forth. I followed them with my eye. They ended in a marble slab on which rested a concrete sphere, somewhat larger than the others. The door of this one was closed. On the roof of the queer edifice was a peculiar arrangement of wires, gleaming in the artificial daylight. This building, too, was heavily guarded.

I had found what I sought—the power-house and the transmitting station. Much good it did me—now.

My warders turned sharply to the right. I glimpsed another concrete structure. A heavy steel door opened, then clanged shut, behind us. The fetid odor that means only one thing the world over, folded round me.

I sprawled on the steel floor of the cell into which I was thrust. A wave of utter fatigue engulfed me. I felt great weariness of body and despair of soul. I had failed in my mission. The fate of my country had been entrusted to me—and here I was in a steel-floored, steel-walled prison cell. And that tunnel was rushing toward New York at three miles an hour; over seventy miles a day.

I think I slept from sheer exhaustion. But something startled me into awaking. The dim light filtering in from the tiny air-hole high up on one wall showed me that I was still alone. I lay, listening. There it was again, a wailing scream of agony that rose and fell and died away.

I heard a grating sound at the door, and it opened and shut. Rubinoff, the Ferret, had entered. "Comfortable, Captain Bolton?" he asked, and there was more than a hint of mockery in the velvety voice. In the hand with the twisted finger was his ray-tube. It pointed steadily at me.

I got to my feet. I was in no mood for trifling, for that

scream had shaken me. "Cut the comedy, Rubinoff." I growled. "Kill me, and let's have done with it."

He raised a deprecating hand. "Oh, come now. There's really no absolute necessity for that. You can save yourself, very easily."

"What do you mean?"

"I can use you, if you're amenable to reason."

"I don't understand."

"You're the cleverest of the American Intelligence men. The rabble they give me are well-nigh useless. Cast your lot in with us, and in a week you'll have the riches of your greatest city to dip your hands in. It's easy. There is certain information we need. Give it to us. Then I'll get you back into your lines: we'll cook up a good tale for Sommers. You can resume your post and send us information only when it is of extreme importance. Come, now, be sensible."

At first blush this was an astounding proposal. But I

knew my man. He needed to know something. Once he had extracted the knowledge he sought from me, I should be disposed of. He'd never let me get back into our lines with what I had found out. It might have been policy to play him—but what was the use?

"No, Rubinoff. You know I won't do it."

He sighed. "Just as I thought. Honor, country, and so on. Well, it's too bad. We should have made a wonderful team. However, you'll tell me what I want to know. What are the defenses within fifty miles of New York?"

I laughed derisively.

"You'll save yourself a lot of trouble if you tell me, Bolton. After all, death in the ray isn't so bad. Whiff—and you're gone. Don't force me to other measures." There was a grim threat in his voice. But I simply shook my head.

"Stubborn, like all the other Anglo-Saxons. Well, I've got something to show you." He raised his weapon

and glanced at it. "Pretty little thing, this. Not the ordinary ray-tube. Only field officers have these. Look."

He pointed it at the wall from behind which that scream had come and pressed the trigger button. A tiny round hole appeared in the steel.

"Neat, isn't it? Utilizes the same ray you saw at work in the tunnel. The Zeta-ray we call it. Just think what that would do to human flesh." I said nothing.

"But that isn't what I had in mind. Just look through that hole."

I wanted to see what was on the other side, so I obeyed. The Thing that lay on the floor within—could it ever have been a man? I whirled back to the Ferret in a fury, my fists clenched.

His infernal weapon was pointing straight at me. "Softly, Bolton, softly. You'd never get to me." I checked my spring, for he was right. "How'd you like that?" he purred.

"Some of your work, I suppose," I growled.

"The poor fool was fomenting a mutiny. We wanted to know the other plotters. He was stubborn. What would you? Necessity knows no law.... What are the defenses around New York?" He advanced menacingly.

No answer.

"Why be a fool? This ray hurts, I tell you, when it's properly applied. How would you like to be melted away, piece by little piece, till you're like that in there?"

I shrugged my shoulders, but kept silent.

"I tell you it hurts. You don't believe me? That in there is unconscious, seven-eighths dead. Listen."

He bored another hole in the steel, keeping his finger pressed on the trigger. Again that heart-rending scream of agony rang out, tearing its way through me. My brain exploded in red rage. I leaped for the

fiend, reckless of consequences. My fist drove into the leering face with all the force of my spring, with all the insane fury that his heartless cruelty had roused in me. Smack!—he catapulted across the floor and crashed into the wall! I was on him, my hand clutching for his tube. But there was no need. He was out—dead to the world. So sudden, so unexpected was my mad attack that even he had not had time to meet it.

I worked fast. In a minute I was in Rubinoff's uniform and had assumed his face. I was a little taller; no matter. But the finger—that would be noticed immediately. There was only one thing to do. I stuck my little finger through one of the holes he had made in the wall and twisted. Crack! Beads of agony stood out on my forehead, but the break was just right. By bending the other fingers slightly I could hold that one in just the position of his.

I picked up the ray-tube with my left hand. If I went out through the guard-house entrance I might meet other officers and be engaged in conversation. That might lead to discovery. My cell was on the side of the

prison away from the road; I had noticed no buildings behind it: I'd chance it. Luck had been with me so far.

I carved out a hole in the wall pierced by the air-hole. It was like cutting through butter with a red hot knife. I stepped out.

There was no one about. I walked carelessly around the corner of the building, my hand, holding the tube, buried deep in my pocket. Not far away was the spherical structure I had spotted as the control room. I returned salutes. No one stopped to talk to me. Would the guard before that building require a password?

I heard a shout behind me. My escape was discovered! At once I broke into a run and dashed past the guard, shouting: "Prisoner escaped! Came this way!" The man gaped. The shouting behind me grew louder. I heard the thud of many feet, running. I flung open the door, slammed it shut behind me, and turned the key.

A long row of giant electrode bulbs, as tall as a man,

stretched before me—the source of the Zeta-ray. From here came the power that held back the waters, that bored the tunnel. A thunderous knocking shook the door. Someone at a huge switchboard turned toward me. Instantly my hand was out of my pocket, and the ray-tube leveled at the nearest bulb. I pressed the trigger. The bulb crashed. I swept down the line. Crash, crash, crash—they were all gone.



I whirled to meet the expected attack. It was wholly instinctive, for in a second we'd all be dead anyway. The waters would be down on us.

But the switchboard operator wasn't springing at me.

Instead, he was tugging frantically, at a long lever that came down from above. There was a clang, and a steel shutter dropped across the door.

Then came a sound of crashing thunder that split my eardrums with its unbearable clamor. Then a mightier roar, as the mountain-high sea, held back so long by the invisible ray, poured its countless millions of tons of deep green water down into the man-made hole.

The impact was terrific. The yards-thick concrete shuddered and strained. The tremendous pressure forced trickles of water into the concrete shell: the roaring of the elements was indescribably deafening.

I was in pitch darkness, expecting every moment to be crushed under miles of ocean, when suddenly I was thrown from my feet. The floor was heaving drunkenly beneath me. In a moment I was slammed breathlessly against the shattered remnants of a huge vacuum tube. The jagged glass slashed my arms and face. I grabbed with my hand to steady myself; came in contact with an iron bar: clung like grim death.

For a huge concrete sphere was whirling, tossing, gyrating in a welter of waters. The din was terrific. I rolled over and over, my arms almost pulled out of their sockets. Then, like a ton of brick, something collided with my head. There was a blinding flare in the black void, and I knew no more.

Slowly I came out of a hideous nightmare.

My head ached frightfully, and my wounds smarted and stung. It was dark, but a faint luminescence from somewhere enabled me to faintly discern my surroundings. I was wedged between a steel cable-bracket and the curving wall. Across the glass strewn floor a body lay, sprawling queerly.

The room was swaying in long undulations, or was it my head? I lay helpless, unable to move. A leg dangled uselessly. There was a bump, the sound of scraping. I heard confused sounds penetrating the walls, and the jar of steady impacts.

A half an hour passed so; maybe an hour: I had no means of telling. I was weak from pain and loss of

blood, and slightly delirious.

A faint whirring noise, a sudden intensity in the illumination caused me to turn my head. The steel shutter was glowing red, then a shower of white sparks broke through. The heavy steel was melting away into incandescence. It crashed.

A group of men stumbled cautiously in. Now I was sure I was delirious. For the men wore khaki uniforms! Americans! Then, in my fever, I thought I heard a familiar voice cry out my name. It was Jim's voice. A roaring curtain of blackness shut down on me.

When I awoke again I was lying in a clean-sheeted hospital bed. Jim was sitting at the side, staring at me with gloomy eyes.

"Hello, Jim," I gasped weakly. "How did I get here?"

It was touching to see the instantaneous delight on his weathered countenance.

"So you came to at last, you old son-of-a-gun! Thought you were cashing in on us for a while. How did you get here? That's just what I want to know. How in hell did you get here?"

I was still pretty weak. "You pulled me out. What happened?"

"We're still trying to puzzle it out. Wouldn't be surprised if you had a hand in it, you blighter. We were watching that damned cloud, worrying ourselves to death. What with the New York going out like a light, and not hearing anything from you, we were pretty low.

"Then, suddenly, there was a tremendous detonation. The whole cloud mass collapsed like a pricked bubble, and a bottomless pit yawned underneath the ocean—and, next thing we knew, our raft was yanked from under our feet, plunging and bucking in a swirl of waters.

"I just had time to grab hold of a stanchion, when we were sucked down into a whirlpool such as I never

hope to see again. Round and round we spun, the tumbling waters mountain high above us. I was buried most of the time in crashing billows; my arms were almost pulled out of their sockets.

"I never expected to see daylight again," Jim went on. "My hold was being broken when at last we were spewed out somehow onto a sea that looked as if a thousand hurricanes were blowing down.

"I managed to get my men together—what was left of them. There were pitifully few. Later, I heard that our losses were enormous. Over seventy-five per cent of our rafts on a 50-mile front were lost, and the enemies' were almost totally wiped out.

"When the mile-high seas had toned down a bit, we saw a huge concrete ball tossing about like a cork. Couldn't make out what the devil it was. Then someone noticed a door. We got that open, but there was a steel one inside. We had to slice it with an oxy-hydrogen flame. Inside, snug as a bug in a rug, were you.

"Now come on, tell me how in blazes you got in there. If you don't spill it quick, I'll bust."

I sat up in my excitement. "Don't you see, they were afraid the ray might fail. They had those concrete balls stuck all around so that the officers at least could escape, if it did. Their best technical men must have been running the control room. They made sure to have that specially strong. And the wave caused by the water pouring into the hole swept me right over here, just where I started from."

Jim had both hands on my shoulders, was pushing me down. "Whoa, baby, whoa. That's just as clear as a darkness-rayed area. Count up to ten, and start all over again."

"Ten-shun!"

The general himself strode into the room. And then I had to tell my story straight.

June 1931

88 The Man from 2071 Sewell Peaslee Wright

Out of the flow of time there appears to Commander John Hanson a man of mystery from the forgotten past.

Aproximate word count: 7,300

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

Perhaps this story does not belong with my other tales of the Special Patrol Service. And yet, there is, or should be, a report somewhere in the musty archives of the Service, covering the incident.

Not accurately, and not in detail. Among a great mass of old records which I was browsing through the other day, I happened across that report; it occupied exactly three lines in the log-book of the *Ertak*:

"Just before departure, discovered stowaway,

apparently demented, and ejected him."

For the hard-headed higher-ups of the Service, that was report enough. Had I given the facts, they would have called me to the Base for a long-winded investigation. It would have taken weeks and weeks, filled with fussy questioning. Dozens of stoop-shouldered laboratory men would have prodded and snooped and asked for long, written accounts. In those days, keeping the log-book was writing enough for me and being grounded at Base for weeks would have been punishment.

Nothing would have been gained by a detailed report. The Service needed action rather than reports, anyway. But now that I am an old man, on the retired list, I have time to write; and it will be a particular pleasure to write this account, for it will go to prove that these much-honored scientists of ours, with all their tremendous appropriations and long-winded discussions, are not nearly so wonderful as they think they are. They are, and always have been, too much interested in abstract formulas, and not enough in their practical application. I have never had a great

deal of use for them.

I had received orders to report to Earth, regarding a dull routine matter of reorganizing the emergency Base which had been established there. Earth, I might add, for the benefit of those of you who have forgotten your geography of the Universe, is not a large body, but its people furnish almost all of the officer personnel of the Special Patrol Service. Being a native of Earth, I received the assignment with considerable pleasure, despite its dry and uninteresting nature.

It was a good sight to see old Earth, bundled up in her cottony clouds, growing larger and larger in the television disc. No matter how much you wander around the Universe, no matter how small and insignificant the world of your birth, there is a tie that cannot be denied. I have set my ships down upon many a strange and unknown world, with danger and adventure awaiting me, but there is, for me, no thrill which quite duplicates that of viewing again that particular little ball of mud from whence I sprang. I've said that before; I shall probably say it again. I am

proud to claim Earth as my birth-place, small and out-of-the way as she is.

Our Base on Earth was adjacent to the city of Greater Denver, on the Pacific Coast. I could not help wondering, as we settled swiftly over the city, whether our historians and geologists and other scientists were really right in saying that Denver had at one period been far from the Pacific. It seemed impossible, as I gazed down on that blue, tranquil sea, that it had engulfed, hundreds of years ago, such a vast portion of North America. But I suppose the men of science know.

I need not go into the routine business that brought me to Earth. Suffice it to say that it was settled quickly, by the afternoon of the second day: I am referring, of course, to Earth days, which are slightly less than half the length of an enaren of Universe time.

A number of my friends had come to meet me, visit with me during my brief stay on Earth; and, having finished my business with such dispatch, I decided to

spend that evening with them, and leave the following morning. It was very late when my friends departed, and I strolled out with them to their mono-car, returning the salute of the *Ertak's* lone sentry, who was pacing his post before the huge circular exit of the ship.

Bidding my friends farewell, I stood there for a moment under the heavens, brilliant with blue, cold stars, and watched the car sweep swiftly and soundlessly away towards the towering mass of the city. Then, with a little sigh, I turned back to the ship.

The *Ertak* lay lightly upon the earth, her polished sides gleaming in the light of the crescent moon. In the side toward me, the circular entrance gaped like a sleepy mouth; the sentry, knowing the eyes of his commander were upon him, strode back and forth with brisk, military precision. Slowly, still thinking of my friends, I made my way toward the ship.

I had taken but a few steps when the sentry's challenge rang out sharply, "Halt! Who goes there?"

I glanced up in surprise. Shiro, the man on guard, had seen me leave, and he could have had no difficulty in recognizing me. But—the challenge had not been meant for me.

Between myself and the *Ertak* there stood a strange figure. An instant before, I would have sworn that there was no human in sight, save myself and the sentry; now this man stood not twenty feet away, swaying as though ill or terribly weary, barely able to lift his head and turn it toward the sentry.

"Friend," he gasped; "friend!" and I think he would have fallen to the ground if I had not clapped an arm around his shoulders and supported him.

"Just ... a moment," whispered the stranger. "I'm a bit faint.... I'll be all right...."

I stared down at the man, unable to reply. This was a nightmare; no less. I could feel the sentry staring, too.

The man was dressed in a style so ancient that I could not remember the period: Twenty-first Century, at

least; perhaps earlier. And while he spoke English, which is a language of Earth, he spoke it with a harsh and unpleasant accent that made his words difficult, almost impossible, to understand. Their meaning did not fully sink in until an instant after he had finished speaking.

"Shiro!" I said sharply. "Help me take this man inside. He's ill."

"Yes, sir!" The guard leaped to obey the order, and together we led him into the *Ertak*, and to my own stateroom. There was some mystery here, and I was eager to get at the root of it. The man with the ancient costume and the strange accent had not come to the spot where we had seen him by any means with which I was familiar; he had materialized out of the thin air. There was no other way to account for his presence.

He propped the stranger in my most comfortable chair, and I turned to the sentry. He was staring at our weird visitor with wondering, fearful eyes, and when I spoke he started as though stung by an

electric shock.

"Very well," I said briskly. "That will be all. Resume your post immediately. And—Shiro!"

"Yes, sir?"

"It will not be necessary for you to make a report of this incident. I will attend to that. Understand?"

"Yes, sir!" And I think it is to the man's everlasting credit, and to the credit of the Service which had trained him, that he executed a snappy salute, did an about-face, and left the room without another glance at the man slumped down in my big easy chair.

With a feeling of cold, nervous apprehension such as I have seldom experienced in a rather varied and active life, I turned then to my visitor.

He had not moved, save to lift his head. He was staring at me, his eyes fixed in his chalky white face. They were dark, long eyes—abnormally long—and they glittered with a strange, uncanny light.

"You are feeling better?" I asked.

His thin, bloodless lips moved, but for a moment no sound came from them. He tried again.

"Water," he said.

I drew him a glass from the tank in the wall of my room. He downed it at a gulp, and passed the empty glass back to me.

"More," he whispered. He drank the second glass more slowly, his eyes darting swiftly, curiously, around the room. Then his brilliant, piercing glance fell upon my face.

"Tell me," he commanded sharply, "what year is this?"

I stared at him. It occurred to me that my friends might have conceived and executed an elaborate hoax—and then I dismissed the idea, instantly. There were no scientists among them who could make a man materialize out of nothingness.

"Are you in your right mind?" I asked slowly. "Your question strikes me as damnably odd, sir."

The man laughed wildly, and slowly straightened up in the chair. His long, bony fingers clasped and unclasped slowly, as though feeling were just returning to them.

"Your question," he replied in his odd, unfamiliar accent, "is not unnatural, under the circumstances. I assure you that I am of sound mind; of very sound mind." He smiled, rather a ghastly smile, and made a vague, slight gesture with one hand. "Will you be good enough to answer my question? What year is this?"

"Earth year, you mean?"

He stared at me, his eyes flickering.

"Yes," he said. "Earth year. There are other ways of ... figuring time now?"

"Certainly. Each inhabited world has its own system.

There is a master system for the Universe. Who are you, what are you, that you should ask me a question the smallest child should know?"

"First," he insisted, "tell me what year this is, Earth reckoning."

I told him, and the light flickered up in his eyes again—a cruel, triumphant light.

"Thank you," he nodded; and then, slowly and softly, as though he spoke to himself, he added, "Less than half a century off. Less than a half a century! And they laughed at me. How—how I shall laugh at them, presently!"

"You choose to be mysterious, sir?" I asked impatiently.

"No. Presently you shall understand, and then you will forgive me, I know. I have come through an experience such as no man has ever known before. If I am shaken, weak, surprising to you, it is because of that experience."

He paused for a moment, his long, powerful fingers gripping the arms of the chair.

"You see," he added, "I have come out of the past into the present. Or from the present into the future. It depends upon one's viewpoint. If I am distraught, then forgive me. A few minutes ago, I was Jacob Harbauer, in a little laboratory on the edge of a mountain park, near Denver; now I am a nameless being hurtled into the future, pausing here, many centuries from my own era. Do you wonder now that I am unnerved?"

"Do you mean," I said slowly, trying to understand what he had babbled forth, "that you have come out of the past? That you ... that you...." It was too monstrous to put into words.

"I mean," he replied, "that I was born in the year 2028. I am forty-three years old—or I was a few minutes ago. But,"—and his eyes flickered again with that strange, mad light—"I am a scientist! I have left my age behind me for a time; I have done what no other human being has ever done: I have gone

centuries into the future!"

"I—I do not understand." Could he, after all, be a madman? "How can a man leave his own age and travel ahead to another?"

"Even in this age of yours they have not discovered that secret?" Harbauer exulted. "You travel the Universe, I gather, and yet your scientists have not yet learned to move in time? Listen! Let me explain to you how simple the theory is.

"I take it you are an intelligent man; your uniform and its insignia would seem to indicate a degree of rank. Am I correct?"

"I am John Hanson, Commander of the *Ertak*, of the Special Patrol Service," I informed him.

"Then you will be capable of grasping, in part at least, what I have to tell you. It is really not so complex. Time is a river, flowing steadily, powerful, at a fixed rate of speed. It sweeps the whole Universe along on its bosom at that same speed. That is my conception

of it; is it clear to you?"

"I should think," I replied, "that the Universe is more like a great rock in the middle of your stream of time, that stands motionless while the minutes, the hours, and the days roll by."

"No! The Universe travels on the breast of the current of time. It leaves yesterday behind, and sweeps on towards to-morrow. It has always been so until I challenged this so-called immutable law. I said to myself, why should a man be a helpless stick upon the stream of time? Why need he be borne on this slow current at the same speed? Why cannot he do as a man in a boat, paddle backwards or forwards; back to a point already passed; ahead, faster than the current, to a point that, drifting, he would not reach so soon? In other words, why can he not slip back through time to yesterday; or ahead to to-morrow? And if to to-morrow, why not to next year, next century?"

These are the questions I asked myself. Other men have asked themselves the same questions, I know;

they were not new. But,"—Harbauer drew himself far forward in his chair, and leaned close to me, almost as though he prepared himself to spring—"no other man ever found the answer! That remained for me.

"I was not entirely correct, of course. I found that one could not go back in time. The current was against one. But to go ahead, with the current at one's back, was different. I spent six years on the problem, working day and night, handicapped by lack of funds, ridiculed by the press—Look!"

Harbauer reached inside his antiquated costume and drew forth a flat packet which he passed to me. I unfolded it curiously, my fingers clumsy with excitement.

I could hardly believe my eyes. The thing Harbauer had handed me was a folded fragment of newspaper, such as I had often seen in museums. I recognized the old-fashioned type, and the peculiar arrangement of the columns. But, instead of being yellow and brittle with age, and preserved in fragments behind sealed glass, this paper was fresh and white, and the ink was

as black as the day it had been printed. What this man said, then, must be true! He must—

"I can understand your amazement," said Harbauer. "It had not occurred to me that a paper which, to me, was printed only yesterday, would seem so antique to you. But that must appear as remarkable to you as fresh papyrus, newly inscribed with the hieroglyphics of the ancient Egyptians, would seem to one of my own day and age. But read it; you will see how my world viewed my efforts!" There was a sharpness, a bitterness, in his voice that made me vaguely uneasy; even though he had solved the riddle of moving in time as men have always moved in space, my first conjecture that I had a madman to deal with might not be so far from the truth. Ridicule and persecution have unseated the reason of all too many men.

The type was unfamiliar to me, and the spelling was archaic, but I managed to stumble through the article. It read, as nearly as I can recall it, like this:

Harbauer Says Time

Is Like Great River

Jacob Harbauer, local inventor, in an exclusive interview, propounds the theory that man can move about in time exactly as a boat moves about on the surface of a swift-flowing river, save that he cannot go back into time, on account of the opposition of the current.

That is very fortunate, this writer feels; it would be a terrible thing for example, if some good-looking scamp from our present Twenty-first Century were to dive into the past and steal Cleopatra from Antony, or start an affair with Josephine and send Napoleon scurrying back from the front and let the Napoleonic wars go to pot. We'd have to have all our histories rewritten!

Harbauer is well-known in Denver as the eccentric inventor who, for the last five or six years, has occupied a lonely shack in the mountains, guarded by a high fence of barbed wire. He claims that he has now perfected equipment which will enable him to project himself forward in time, and expects to make

the experiment in the very near future.

This writer was permitted to view the equipment which Harbauer says will shoot him into the future. The apparatus is housed in a low, barn-like building in the rear of his shack.

Along one side of the room is a veritable bank of electrical apparatus with innumerable controls, many huge tubes of unfamiliar shape and appearance, a mighty generator of some kind and an intricate maze of gleaming copper bus-bar.

In the center of the room is a circle of metal, about a foot in thickness, insulated from the flooring by four truncated cones of fluted glass. This disc is composed of two unfamiliar metals, arranged in concentric circles.

Above this disc, at a height of about eight feet, is suspended a sort of grid, composed of extremely fine silvery wires, supported on a frame-work of black insulating material.

Asked for a demonstration of his apparatus, Harbauer finally consented to perform an experiment with a dog—a white, short-haired mongrel that, Harbauer informed us, he kept to warn him of approaching strangers.

He bound the dog's legs together securely, and placed the struggling animal in the center of the heavy metal disc. Then the inventor hurried to the central control panel and manipulated several switches, which caused a number of things to happen almost at once.

The big generator started with a growl, and settled immediately into a deep hum; a whole row of tubes glowed with a purplish brilliancy. There was a crackling sound in the air, and the grid above the disc seemed to become incandescent, although it gave forth no apparent heat. From the rim of the metal disc, thin blue streamers of electric flame shot up toward the grid, and the little white dog began to whine nervously.

"Now watch!" shouted Harbauer. He closed another switch, and the space between the disc and the grid

became a cylinder of livid light, for a period of perhaps two seconds. Then Harbauer pulled all the switches, and pointed triumphantly to the disc. It was empty.

We looked around the room for the dog, but he was not visible anywhere.

"I have sent him nearly a century into the future," said Harbauer. "We will let him stay there a moment, and then bring him back."

"You mean to say," we asked, "that the pup is now roaming around somewhere in the Twenty-second Century?" Harbauer said he meant just that, and added that he would now bring the dog back to the present time. The switches were closed again, but this time it was the metal plate that seemed incandescent, and the grid above that shot out the streaks of thin blue flame. As he closed the last switch, the cylinder of light appeared again, and when the switches were opened, there was the dog in the center of the disc, howling and struggling against his bonds.

"Look!" cried Harbauer. "He's been attacked by another dog, or some other animal, while in the future. See the blood on his shoulders?"

We ventured the humble opinion that the dog had scratched or bit himself in struggling to free himself from the cords with which Harbauer had bound him, and the inventor flew into a terrible rage, cursing and waving his arms as though demented. Feeling that discretion was the better part of valor, we beat a hasty retreat, pausing at the barbed-wire gate only long enough to ask Mr. Harbauer if he would be good enough, sometime when he had a few minutes of leisure, to dash into next week and bring back some stock market reports to aid us in our investment efforts.

Under the circumstances, we did not wait for a response, but we presume we are persona non grata at the Harbauer establishment from this time on.

All in all, we are not sorry.

I folded the paper and passed it back to him; some of

the allusions I did not understand, but the general tone of the article was very clear indeed.

"You see?" said Harbauer, his voice grating with anger. "I tried to be courteous to that man; to give him a simple, convincing demonstration of the greatest scientific achievement in centuries. And the fool returned to write this: to hold me up to ridicule, to paint me as a crack-brained, wild-eyed fanatic."

"It's hard for the layman to conceive of a great scientific achievement," I said soothingly. "All great inventions and inventors have been laughed at by the populace at large."

"True. True." Harbauer nodded his head solemnly. "But just the same—" He broke off suddenly, and forced a smile. I found myself wishing that he had completed that broken sentence, however; I felt that he had almost revealed something that would have been most enlightening.

"But enough of that fool and his babblings," he continued. "I am here as living proof that my

experiment is a success, and I have a tremendous curiosity about the world in which I find myself. This, I take it, is a ship for navigating space?"

"Right! The *Ertak*, of the Special Patrol Service. Would you care to look around a bit?"

"I would, indeed." There was a tremendous eagerness in the man's voice.

"You're not too tired?"

"No; I am quite recovered from my experience." Harbauer leaped to his feet, those abnormally long, slitted eyes of his glowing. "I am a scientist, and I am most curious to see what my fellows have created since—since my own era."

I picked up my dressing gown and tossed it to him.

"Slip this on, then, to cover your clothing. You would be an object of too much curiosity to those men who are on duty," I suggested.

I was taller than he, and the garment came within a few inches of the floor. He knotted the cincture around his middle and thrust his hands into the pockets, turning to me for approval. I nodded, and motioned for him to precede me through the door.

As an officer of the Special Patrol Service, it has often been my duty to show parties and individuals through my ship. Most of these parties are composed of females, who have only exclamations to make instead of intelligent comment, and who possess an unbounded capacity for asking utterly asinine questions. It was, therefore, a real pleasure to show Harbauer through the ship.

He was a keen, eager listener. When he asked a question, and he asked many of them, he showed an amazing grasp of the principles involved. My knowledge of our equipment was, of course, only practical, save for the rudimentary theoretical knowledge that everyone has of present-day inventions and devices.

The ethon tubes which lighted the ship, interested

him but little. The atomic generators, the gravity pads, their generators, and the disintegrator-ray, however, he delved into with that frenzied ardor of which only a scientist, I believe, is capable.

Questions poured out of him, and I answered them as best I could: sometimes completely, and satisfactorily, so that he nodded and said, "I see! I see!" and sometimes so poorly that he frowned, and cross-questioned me insistently until he obtained the desired information.

In the big, sound-proof navigating room, I explained the operation of the numerous instruments, including the two three-dimensional charts, actuated by super-radio reflexes, the television disc, the attraction meter, the surface-temperature gauge and the complex control system.

"Forward," I added, "is the operating room. You can see it through these glass partitions. The navigating officer in command relays his orders to men in the operating room, who attend to the actual execution of those orders."

"Just as a pilot, or the navigating officer of a ship of my day gives his orders to the quartermaster at the wheel," nodded Harbauer, and began firing questions at me again, going over the ground we had covered, to check up on his information. I was amazed at the uncanny accuracy with which he had grasped such a great mass of technical detail. It had taken me years of study to pick up what he had taken from me, and apparently retained intact, in something more than an hour, Earth time.

I glanced at the Earth-time clock on the wall of the navigating room as he triumphantly finished his questioning. Less than an hour remained before the time set for our return trip.

"I'm sorry," I commented, "to be an ungracious host, but I am wondering what your plans may be? You see, we are due to start in less than an hour, and—"

"A passenger would be in your way?" Harbauer smiled as he uttered the words, but there was a gleam in his long eyes that rather startled me, and I wondered if I only imagined the steeliness of his

voice. "Don't let that worry you, sir."

"It's not worrying me," I replied, watching him closely. "I have enjoyed a very remarkable, a very pleasant experience. If you should care to remain aboard the *Ertak*, I should like exceedingly to have you accompany us to our Base, where I could place you in touch with other laboratory men, with whom you would have much in common."

Harbauer threw back his head and laughed—not pleasantly.

"Thanks!" he said. "But I have no time for that. They could give me no knowledge that I need, now; you have told me and showed me enough. I understand how you have released atomic energy; it is a matter so simple that a child should have guessed it, and man has wondered about it for centuries, knowing that the power was there, but lacking a key to unfetter it. And now I have that key!"

"True. But perhaps our scientists would like, in exchange, the secret of moving forward in time," I

suggested, reasonably enough.

"What do I care about them?" snapped Harbauer. He loosened the cord of the robe with a quick, impatient gesture, as though it confined him too tightly, and threw the garment from him.

Then, suddenly, he took a quick stride toward me, and thrust out his ugly head.

"I know enough now to give me power over all my world," he cried. "Haven't you guessed the reason for my interest in your engines of destruction? I came down the centuries ahead of my generation so that I might come back with power in my hand; power to wipe out the fools who have made a mock of me. And I have that power—here!" He tapped his forehead dramatically with his left hand.

"I will bring a new regime to my era!" he continued, fairly shouting now. "I will be what many men have tried to be, and what no man has ever been—master of the world! Absolute, unquestioned, supreme master!" He paused, his eyes glaring into mine—and I

knew from the light that shone behind those long, narrow slits, that I was dealing with a madman.

"True; you will," I said gently, moving carelessly toward the microphone. With that in my hand, a slight pressure on the General Attention signal, and I would have the whole crew of the *Ertak* here in a moment. But I had explained the workings of the navigating room's equipment only too well.

"Stop!" snarled Harbauer, and his right hand flashed up. "See this? Perhaps you don't know what it is; I'll tell you. It's an automatic pistol—not so efficient as your disintegrator-ray, but deadly enough. There is certain death for eight men in my hand. Understand?"

"Perfectly." What an utter fool I had been! I was not armed, and I knew that Harbauer spoke the truth. I had often seen weapons similar to the one he held in the military museums. They are still there, if you are curious—rusty and broken, but not unlike our present atomic pistols in general appearance. They propelled the bullet by the explosion of a sort of powder; inefficient, of course, but, as he had said, deadly

enough for the purpose.

"Good! You are a good sort Hanson, but don't take any chances. I'm not going to, I promise you. You see,"—and he laughed again, the light in his long eyes dancing with evil—"I'm not likely to be punished for a few killings committed centuries after I'm dead. I have never killed a man, but I won't hesitate to do so now, if one—or more—should get in my way."

"But why," I asked soothingly, "should you wish to kill anyone? You have what you came for, you say; why not depart in peace?"

He smiled crookedly, and his eyes narrowed with cunning.

"You approve of my little plan to dominate the world?" he asked softly, his eyes searching my face.

"No," I said boldly, refusing to lie to him. "I do not, and you know it."

"Very true." He pulled out his watch with his left

hand, and held it before his eyes so that he could observe the time without losing sight of me for even an instant. "I doubted that I could secure your willing cooperation; therefore, I am commanding it.

"You see, there are certain instruments and pieces of equipment that I should like to take back to my laboratory with me. Perhaps I would be able to reproduce them without models, but with the models my task will be much easier.

"The question remaining is a simple one: will you give the proper orders to have this equipment removed to the spot where you first saw me, or shall I be obliged to return to my own era without this equipment—leaving behind me a dead commander of the Special Patrol Service, and any other who may try to stop me?"

I tried to keep cool under the lash of his mocking voice. I have never been adept at holding my temper when I should, but somehow I managed it this time. Frowning, I kept him waiting for a reply, utilizing the time to do what was perhaps the hardest, fastest

thinking of my life.

There wasn't a particle of doubt in my mind regarding his ability to make good his threat, nor his readiness to do so. I caught the faint glimmering of an idea and fenced with it eagerly.

"How are you going to go back to your own period—your own era?" I asked him. "You told me, I believe, that it was impossible to move backward in time."

"That's not answering my question," he said, leering. "Don't think you're fooling me! But I'll tell you, just the same. I can go back to my own era: that is, back to my own actual existence. I shall return just two hours after I leave; I could not go back farther than that, and it's not necessary that I do so. I can go back only because I came from that present; I am not really of this future at all. I go back from whence I came."

"But," I objected, thinking of something I had read in the clipping he had showed me, "you're not going back to your own era. You cannot. If you returned, you would put your project into execution, and history

does not record that activity." I saw from the sudden narrowing of his abnormally long eyes that I had caught his interest, and I pressed my advantage hastily. "Remember that all the history of your time is written, Harbauer. It is in the books of Earth's history, with which every child of this age, into which you have thrust yourself, is familiar. And those histories do not record the domination of the world by yourself. So—you are confronted by an impossibility!"

My reasoning, now, sounds specious, and yet it was a line of thought which could not be waved aside. I saw Harbauer's black brows knit together, and mounting anger darken his face. I do not know, but I believe I was never nearer death than I was at that instant.

"Fool!" he cried. "Idiot! Imbecile! Do you think you can confuse me, turn me from my purpose, with words? Do you? Do you believe me to be a child, or a weakling? I tell you, I have planned this thing to the last detail. If I had not found what I sought on this first trip, I would have taken another, a dozen, a score, until I found the information I sought. The last six years of my life I have worked day and night to

this end; your histories and your words—"

My plan had worked. The man was beside himself with insane anger. And in his rage he forgot, for an instant, that he was my captor.

Taking a desperate chance, I launched myself at his legs. His weapon roared over my head, just as I struck. I felt the hot gas from the thing beat against my neck; I caught the reeking scent of the smoke. Then we were both on the floor, and locked in a mad embrace.

Harbauer was a smaller man than myself, but he had the amazing strength of a Zenian. He fought viciously, using every ounce of his strength against me, striving to bring his weapon into use, hammering my head upon the floor, racking my body mercilessly, grunting, cursing, mumbling constantly as he did so.

But I was in better trim than Harbauer. I have never seen a laboratory man who could stand the strain of prolonged physical exertion. Bending over test-tubes and meters is no life for a man. At grips with him, I

was in my own element, and he was out of his. I let him wear himself out, exerting myself as little as possible, confining my efforts to keeping his weapon where he could not use it.

I felt him weakening at last. His breath was coming in great sobs, and his long eyes started from their sockets with the strained effort he was putting forth. And then, with a single mighty effort, I knocked the pistol from his hand, so that it slid across the floor and brought up with a crash against a wall of the room.

"Now!" I said, and turned on him.

He knew, at that moment when I put forth my strength, that I had been playing with him. I read the shock of sudden fear in his eyes. My right arm went about him in a deadly hold; I had him in a grip that paralyzed him. Grimly, I jerked him to his feet, and he stood there trembling with weakness, his shoulders heaving as his breath came and went between his teeth.

"You realize, of course, that you're not going back?" I said quietly.

"Back?" Half dazed, he stared at me through the quivering lids of his peculiar eyes. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that you're not going back to your own era. You have come to us, uninvited, and—you're going to stay here."

"No!" he shouted, and struggled so desperately to free himself that I was hard put to it to hold him, without tightening my grip sufficiently to dislocate his shoulders. "You wouldn't do that! I must return; I must prove to them—"

"That's exactly what must not happen, and what shall not happen," I interrupted. "And what will not happen. You are in a strange predicament, Harbauer; it is already written that you do not return. Can't you see that, man? If it were to be that you left this age and returned to your own, you would make known your discovery. History would record it. And history

does not record it. You are struggling, not against me, but against—against a fate that has been sealed all these centuries."

When I had finished, he stared at me as though hypnotized, motionless and limp in my grasp. Then, suddenly, he began to shake and I saw such depths of terror and horror in his eyes as I hope never to see again.

Mechanically, he glanced down at his watch, lifting his wrist into his line of vision as slowly and ponderously as though it bore a great weight.

"Two ... two minutes," he whispered huskily. "Then the automatic switch will close, back in my laboratory. If I am not standing where ... where you found me ... between the disc and the grid of my time machine, where the reversed energy can reach me, to ... to take me back ... God!"

He sagged in my arms and dropped to his knees, sobbing.

"And yet ... what you say is true. It is already written that I did not return." His sobs cut harshly through the silence of the room. Pitying his despair, I reached down to give him a sympathetic pat on the shoulder. It is a terrible thing to see a man break down as Harbauer had done.

As he felt my grip on him relax, he suddenly shot his fist into the pit of my stomach, and leaped to his feet. Groaning, I doubled up, weak and nerveless, for the instant, from the vicious, unexpected blow.

"Ah!" shrieked Harbauer. "You soft-hearted fool!" He struck me in the face, sending me crashing to the floor, and snatched up his pistol.

"I'm going, now," he shouted. "Going! What do I care for your records and your histories? They are not yet written; if they were I'd change them." He bent over me and snatched from my hand the ring of keys, one of which I had used to unlock the door of the navigating room. I tried to grip him around the legs, but he tore himself loose, laughing insanely in a high-pitched, cackling sound that seemed hardly human.

"Farewell!" he called mockingly from the doorway. Then the door slammed, and as I staggered to my feet, I heard the lock click.

I must have acted then by instinct or inspiration. There was no time to think. It would take him not more than three or four seconds to make his way to the exit, stroll by the guard to the spot where we had found him, and—disappear. By the time I could arouse the crew, and have my orders executed, his time would be up, and—unless the whole affair were some terrible nightmare—he would go hurtling back through time to his own era, armed with a devastating knowledge.

There was only one possible means of preventing his escape in time. I ran across the room to the emergency operating controls, cut in the atomic generators with one hand and pulled the Vertical-Ascent lever to Full Power.

There was a sudden shriek of air, and my legs almost thrust themselves through my body. Quickly, I pushed the lever back until, with my eye on the altimeter, I

held the *Ertak* at her attained height—something over a mile, as I recall it. Then I pressed the General Attention signal, and snatched up the microphone.

Less than a minute later Correy and Hendricks, fellow officers, were in the room and besieging me with solicitous questions.

It had been my idea, of course, to keep Harbauer from leaving the ship, but it was not so destined.

Shiro, the sentry on duty outside the *Ertak*, was the only witness to Harbauer's fate.

"I was walking my post, sir," he reported, "watching the sun come up, when suddenly I heard the sound of running feet inside the ship. I turned towards the entrance and drew my pistol, to be in readiness. I saw the stranger we had taken into the ship appear at the exit, which, as you know, was open.

"Just as I opened my mouth to command him to halt, the *Ertak* shot up from the ground at terrific speed. The stranger had been about to leap upon me; indeed,

he had discharged some sort of weapon at me, for I heard a crash of sound, and a missile of some kind, as you know, passed through my left arm.

"As the ship left the ground, he tried to draw back, but he was off balance, and the inertia of his body momentarily incapacitated him, I think. He slipped, clutched at the gangway across the threads which seal the exit, and then, at a height I estimate to be around five hundred feet, he fell. The *Ertak* shot on up until it was lost to sight, and the stranger crashed to the ground a few feet from where I was standing—on almost exactly the spot where we first saw him, sir.



And now, sir, comes the part I guess you'll find hard to believe. When he struck the ground, he was smashed flat; he died instantly. I started to run toward him, and then—and then I stopped. My eyes had not left the

spot for a moment, sir, but he—his body, that is—suddenly disappeared. That's the truth, sir, for I saw it with my own eyes. There wasn't a sign of him left."

"I see," I replied. I believe that I did. We had gone straight up, and his body, by no great coincidence, had fallen upon the spot close to the exit of the *Ertak* where we had first found him. And his machine, in operation, had brought him, or rather, his mangled body, back to his own age. "You have not mentioned this affair to anyone, Shiro?"

"No, sir. It wasn't anything you'd be likely to tell: nobody would believe you. I went at once to have my arm attended to, and then reported here according to orders."

"Very good, Shiro. Keep the entire affair to yourself. I will make all the necessary reports. That is an order—understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then that will be all. Take good care of your arm."

He saluted with his good hand and left me.

Later in the day I wrote in the log-book of the *Ertak* the report I mentioned at the beginning of this tale:

"Just before departure, discovered stowaway, apparently demented, and ejected him."

That was a perfectly truthful statement, and it served its purpose. I have given the whole story in detail just to prove what I have so often contended: that these owlsh laboratory men whom this age reveres so much are not nearly so wise and omnipotent as they think they are.

I am quite sure that they would have discredited, or attempted to discredit, my story, had I told it at the time. They would have resented the idea that someone so much ahead of them had discovered a principle that still baffles this age of ours, and I would have had no evidence to present.

Perhaps even now the story will be discredited; if so, I do not care. I am much too old, and too near the

portals of that impenetrable mystery, in the shadow of which I have stood so many times, to concern myself with what others may think or say.

I know that what I have related here is the truth, and in my mind I have a vivid and rather pitiful picture of a mangled body, bloody and alone, in the barn-like structure the ancient paper had described; a body, broken and motionless, lying athwart the striated metal disc, like a sacrificial victim—a victim and a sacrifice of science.

There have been many such.

89 Manape the Mighty by Arthur Josephus Burks

High in jungle treetops swings young Bentley—his human brain imprisoned in a mighty ape.

Aproximate word count: 27,500

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

Chapter I: Castaway

Lee Bentley never knew how many others, if any, lived on after the Bengal Queen struck the hidden reef and sank like a stone. He had only a hazy memory of the catastrophe, and recalled that when she had struck and the alarm had gone rocketing through the great passenger boat—though no alarm was really necessary because she went to pieces so fast—that he had leaped far over the rail and swam straight out, fast, in order to escape being dragged down by the suction of the sinking liner.

The screaming of frightened women and children would ring in his ears until the day the grave closed over him—screaming that was made all the more terrible by the crashing roar of the raging black seas which came out of the darkness to make the affair all the more hideous, and to bear down beneath them into the sea the feeble struggling ones who had no chance for their lives. Lifeboats had been smashed in their davits.

Bentley swam straight away after he was satisfied at last that he could do nothing more. He had helped men and women reach bits of wreckage until he could scarcely any longer keep his wearied arms to the task of keeping his own head above water. He knew even as he helped the white-faced ones that few of them would ever live through it, but he was doing the best he knew—a man's job.

When absolutely sure that he could do nothing further, when he could no longer hear cries of distress, or discover struggling forms in the sea which he might aid, he had turned his back on the graveyard of the Bengal Queen and had struck for shore. He

remembered the direction, for before sunset that evening, in company with several ship's under officers, he had studied the navigation charts upon which each day's run of the Bengal Queen was shown. Ahead of him now was the coast of Africa, though what part of it he knew but in the haziest way. He might not guess within a hundred miles.

One thing only he remembered exactly. The second officer had said, apropos of nothing in particular:

"This wouldn't be a happy place to be shipwrecked. This section of the coast is a regular hangout of the great anthropoid apes. You know, those babies that can pick a man apart as a man would pluck the legs off a fly."

Bentley had merely grinned. The second officer's remarks had sounded to him as though the fellow had been reading more than his fair share of lurid fiction of the South African jungles.

However, apes or no apes, the shore would look good to Lee Bentley now. And he fully intended making it.

He knew he could swim for hours if it became necessary, and he refused to think of the possibility of sharks. If one got him, well, that was one of the chances one had to take when one was shipwrecked against one's will.

So he alternately swam toward where he expected to find land, and floated on his back to rest.

"A swell ending to a great life, if I don't make it," he told himself. "I wonder how the old man will take it when the world reads that the Bengal Queen went down with all on board? He'll be relieved, maybe, for he was about ready to wash his hands of me if I can read signs at all."

It might be said that Bentley was his own worst critic, for he really was not a bad sort of a fellow. He was a good American, over-educated perhaps, with a yen to delve into forbidden places usually avoided by his own kind, and of digging into books which were better left with the pages unturned. There were strange ruins in Africa, he knew. He had gathered a weird fund of information from such books as he

could unearth relative to ancient ruins and vanished races, to the lurid accounts of strange deaths of the various scientists who had taken active part in the opening of the tomb of Tutankhamen.

There were queer things in the heart of darkest Africa, and such things intrigued him. He could take whatever chances with his life he saw fit, for his only relative was a father, and he had never attached himself to any woman nor permitted any woman to attach herself to him—because he could never be sure that her interest might not primarily be in his bank account.

"If, as, and when," he told himself as he rode the waves through the night, "I reach the coast I'll be tossed into black Africa in a way I was not expecting. Anyway, if I live through, I can at least go about my work without the governor interfering. I only hope it won't be hard on the old fellow. He isn't a bad egg at all, and I guess I have given him plenty to think about and worry over."

He turned on his stomach again and struck out. He

had managed to rid himself of all of his clothing except his underwear. They had only weighed him down, and he recalled, with a wry grin, that Africa as a whole went in but little for the latest in men's sport wear.

It must have been a good hour since he had lost the Bengal Queen back there in the raging deep, that he heard the faint call through the murk.

"Help, for God's sake!"

He listened for a repetition of the call, minded to believe that his ears had tricked him. He fancied it had been a woman's voice, but no woman could have lived so long in those raging seas, in which any moment Bentley himself expected to be overwhelmed. For himself he regarded death more or less philosophically, but a woman out there, crying for help, was a different matter entirely. It tore at his heartstrings, mostly because he realized his inability to be of material assistance.

He was sure that he had been mistaken about the cry,

when it came again.

"For God's sake, help!"

It came from his left and this time it was unmistakable, piteous and unnerving. Lee Bentley had the horrible fear that he would never reach her in time to help—though what help he could give, when he could barely manage to keep himself afloat, he could not forsee.

He was swimming down the side of a monster wave. He could see something white in the trough, and he struggled manfully to make headway, while the angry waters tossed him about like a bit of cork and seemed bent on defeating his most furious efforts. He saw the bit of white ride high on the next wave, pass over it and vanish. He dived straight through the wave as it towered over him. He came up, gasping, his hands all but clutching at a pair of hands that reached out of the waters and grasped with a last desperate effort at the sky.

Ahead of the hands was a broken piece of oar. Those

hands had just despairingly relinquished their grip on the one chance of safety, if any chance there could possibly be in that mad midnight waste.

He pulled on the wrists and a white face came to view. Wild, staring eyes looked into his. Black hair flowed back from a face whose lips were blue and thin.

"Take it easy," he counseled. "Turn on your back and rest while I see if I can get back your life-boat."

He captured the oar, and found it practically useless to sustain any appreciable weight, but he clung to it because it was at least better than nothing at all. It had held the girl afloat for over an hour and might be made to serve again somehow. With his left hand under the woman's head and his right grasping the oar he turned on his back to regain his breath. He was deep in the water because the woman was now almost on top of him; but her face was above water. He knew instinctively that she had fainted, and he was a little glad. If she were the usual hysterical woman her fighting would drown them both. As a

dead weight she was easier to handle.

They drifted on, and hope began to mount high in the heart of Lee Bentley—the hope that they might yet reach land. When, hours later, he could hear the roaring of breakers he was sure of it—if the breakers could be passed in safety. After that their fate was in the lap of the gods.

The girl too must have heard, for she turned at last in Bentley's arms and began to swim for herself. She was a strong swimmer and the period during which she had been out of things had revived her amazingly. She even managed a smile as she swam beside Bentley into the creamy breakers behind which they could make out the blackness of shore.

They were so close together that at times their hands touched as they swam, and could make themselves heard by dint of shouting, though they both husbanded their strength and their breathing for swimming.

"I'm not dressed for company," he told her. "I left my

tuxedo aboard the Bengal Queen!"

It was then that her lips twisted into a smile.

"I wouldn't even allow my maid into my stateroom if I were dressed as I am at the moment," she answered strongly, "but we're both grown up I think, and there are times when conventions go by the board. We'll pretend it doesn't matter!"

Then mutually helping each other they fought through the breakers into the calmer water behind, and managed at last to stand in water hip deep, with the undertow dragging at their limbs. They looked at each other and clasped hands without a word. They strode to the sandy beach beyond which the jungle reached away to some invisible horizon, and continued on until they were at last beyond the reach of the waves.

They did not look at each other again, though Bentley did notice that her garb was as scanty almost as his own, consisting mostly of a slip which the water had pasted fast against her flesh. Beyond noting that she

seemed to be young, Bentley did not intrude. Nor did he think of the future. It was enough for the moment that they had escaped the might of angry Neptune, god of the seas.

They dropped to the sands side by side, and the sands were warm. That the jungle behind them might be alive with wild beasts they did not pause to consider. Bentley had gazed at the jungle a moment before dropping down.

He had noticed but one thing—a moving light somewhere among the tangled mass, a light as of a monster firefly erratically darting through the deeper gloom.

The girl—he had noted she was as much girl as woman—dropped to the sand and stretched herself out. Bentley looked about him for a moment, just now realizing what he had been through. Then he dropped down beside the girl, and put one arm over her protectively, an instinctive movement. The two were alone in an alien world, and even this slight contact gave Bentley a feeling of companionship he found at

the time peculiarly appealing.

The girl was in a drugged sort of sleep, but she stirred at the touch of his arm, and her hand came up so that her fingertips touched his cheek.

He slept heavily, while outside on the raging deep the storm swept on along the coast, bearing with it the secret of the rest of those who only last night had looked forward to a pleasant voyage aboard the Bengal Queen.

The last thought in Bentley's mind was of that flickering light he had seen. It was not important, but memory of it clung, and followed him into his sleep with his dreams—in which he seemed to be following a darting, erratic light through a jungle without end.

He wakened with the sun burning his face and torso, and turned on his stomach with a groan. The heat ate into his back unbearably and he finally sat up, rubbed his eyes and stared out to sea. Then it all came back and he looked about him for the girl. She had disappeared.

He rose to his feet and shouted.

An answering cry came back to him, and after a moment the girl appeared around a bend in a shoreline where she had been masked by a wall of the jungle and came toward him. She was carrying something in her hands. When she stood at last before him he noted that she carried a bundle of cloth that was dripping wet.

"We need something to cover us," she said simply. "I was tempted to garb myself, but I did not wish to seem like a simpering prudish female, which I'm not at all. So I brought my findings here so that we could get together and fix up something to protect us from the sun."

"You're a sensible woman," said Bentley. "I've never understood why people should be so sensitive about their bodies. Mine isn't bad and yours, if you'll pardon me, is superb. That's not a compliment, just a statement of fact—which will help us to understand each other better. I've a hunch we're going to be some time in each other's company and we may as well

know things about each other. My name's Lee Bentley."

"Mine is Ellen Estabrook."

Solemnly they shook hands. And their hands clung convulsively, for as though their handshake had been a signal there came a strange sound from the jungle behind them.

A burst of laughter that was plainly human—and another sound which caused the short hair at the base of Bentley's skull to rise, shift oddly, and settle back again.

The sound was like the beating of a skin-tight drumhead by the fists of a jungle savage. But if such it was the drum was a mighty drum, and the savage was a giant, for the sound went rolling through the jungle like an invisible tidal wave of sound.

Both the laughter and the drumming ceased as suddenly as they had sounded.

The man and woman laughed jerkily, dropped to the sand side by side and considered the necessity of clothes.

Chapter 2: Into the Jungle

They had to smile together at the results achieved with the bedraggled bits of cloth. Bentley suspected that they had been taken from bodies washed ashore as gruesome reminders of the catastrophe which had befallen the Bengal Queen, and because he did suspect this he did not ask questions that might cause Ellen to remember any longer than was necessary. Not that he doubted her courage, for she had proved that sufficiently; and she had proved that she was sensible, with none of the notions of the proprieties which would have made any other girl of Bentley's acquaintance a nuisance.

Their next concern was food, which they must find in the jungle, or from other wreckage cast ashore from the Bengal Queen. Now, hand in hand—which seemed natural in the circumstances—they began to walk along the shore, heading into the north by mutual consent.

As they walked Bentley kept pondering on that strange laughter he had heard and on the sound of

savage drumming. The laughter puzzled him. If there were anyone in the jungle back of them, why had he or they failed to challenge them?

As for the drumming sound—Bentley remembered what the second officer had said about this section of the coast. It was a bit of jungle inhabited by the great apes in large numbers. So, that drumming had been a challenge, the man-ape's manner of mocking an enemy by beating himself on his barrel chest with his huge fists. But that the ape had not been challenging Bentley and the girl Bentley felt quite sure, as the brute would certainly have shown himself in that case.

They trudged on through the sand, while the sun beat down unmercifully on their uncovered heads. Ellen Estabrook strode along at Bentley's side without complaint.

After perhaps an hour of this unbearable effort, when both felt as though the sun had sucked them dry of perspiration, they encountered a rough footpath leading into the jungle. The path suggested human

habitation somewhere near. The inhabitants might be hostile natives, even cannibals perhaps, but in this unknown land they would have to take a chance on that.

With a sigh of relief, and refusing to look ahead too far, or try to guess what lay in wait for them in the black mystery of the jungle, they turned into the footpath. The jungle was fetid and sweaty, but even this was a relief from the intolerable sun which could not reach them here because the jungle had closed its leafy arms over the trail instantly. One could not tell from the path whether it had been made by natives or by whites, for it was packed hard. It led straight away from the shoreline.

"We'll have to keep a sharp lookout for possible poisoned spring darts, Ellen," said Bentley.

"I'm not afraid, Lee," she answered stoutly. "Fate wouldn't allow us to come through what we have only to end things with poisoned darts. It just couldn't happen that way!"

Thus simply they addressed each other. It seemed as though years had been squeezed into a matter of hours. They knew each other as well as they would, in other circumstances, have known each other after a year of constant association. Here barriers of conventions were razed as simply and naturally as among children.

They had pressed well into the gloom of the jungle when the first sound came.

Not the laughter they had heard before, but the drumming. It was ahead and somewhat to the left, and as they stopped without speaking they could distinctly hear the threshing of a huge body through the underbrush. The sound seemed to be approaching and for a minute or so they listened. Then the sound was repeated off to the right, a trifle further away.

"Can you climb, Ellen?" asked Bentley simply. "This section is filled with anthropoid apes, according to the second officer of the Bengal Queen. We may have to take to the trees."

"I can climb," she said, "but from what I've studied of the habits of these brutes they do a great deal of bluffing before they actually charge, and may not molest us at all if we pay no attention."

Bentley felt almost nude because he had no weapons save his own fists. And he would not have admitted even to himself how deeply he was concerned over the girl. As far as he knew, this section might be entirely uninhabited. It might be given over entirely to the anthropoids. In this case he shuddered to think of what might happen to Ellen Estabrook if he were slain.

He quickened his pace until Ellen kept stride with him with difficulty. The object uppermost in Bentley's mind was to get as far away as possible from the ominous drumbeats.

They rounded a bend in the trail and stopped stock-still.

Within fifty yards of them, blocking the trail, was a brute whose great size sent a thrill of horror through

Bentley. It towered to the height of a big man, and must have weighed in the neighborhood of four hundred pounds. It was larger by far than any bull ape Bentley had seen in captivity.

It had been waiting for them, silently, with almost human cunning; but now that it was discovered the shaggy creature rose to his hind legs and screamed a challenge, at the same time striking his chest with blows of his hairy fists which rolled in a dull booming of sound through the jungle. At the same time the creature moved forward.

Bentley whirled to run, his hand clasping tighter the hand of Ellen Estabrook. But they had not retreated ten steps down the pathway when their way was blocked by another of the great shaggy brutes. And they could hear others on both sides.

Bentley's face was chalk-white as he turned to the girl. Her calm acceptance of their predicament, an attitude in which he could read no slightest vestige of fear, helped him to regain control of his own nerves, which had threatened to send him into a panic. She

even smiled, and Lee felt a trifle ashamed of himself.

Now the crashing sounds were closing in. The two brutes before and behind on the trail were pressing in upon them. But no general headlong charge had yet begun. Bentley looked around him, seeking a tree with limbs low enough for them to reach and thus climb to safety.

"There's one!" cried Ellen. Tugging at his hand she began to run.

At the same moment the great apes bellowed and charged.

But the charge was never finished, for through the drumming of their mighty fists on mighty barrel-like chests, through the sound of their charge, through the crackling underbrush came again that sound of laughter. There was fierce joy in the laughter, and the laughter was followed by words of a strange gibberish which Bentley could not recall as being from any language he had ever heard.

The great apes paused. Out of the jungle to the right of the fugitives burst a white man. He was well past middle age, for his white hair hung almost to his shoulders, which were stooped with the weight of years. He was a wisp of a man whose smooth shaven face was apple-red. His eyes were black and expressionless as obsidian, and when Lee encountered the full gaze of them he was conscious of that feeling which he had experienced at various times in his life when he knew that some deadly reptile was close by.

"Stand still a moment!" cried the old man. His voice was strangely high-pitched and cracked.

From his right hand a whip with a long lash uncurled like a snake.

This he swung back and hurled to the front, and the snap of it was like a pistol shot. The great ape on the path ahead cowered back, bearing his fangs, roaring in anger. But that he feared the whip of the old man was plain to be seen. The crashing sound in the jungle died away rapidly, immediately the first report of the

whip lash sounded in the trail.

Fearlessly the little man dashed upon the first of the great brutes the castaways had seen. His lash curled about the great beast's body, and the animal bellowed with pain. It clawed at the lash, but was not fast enough to capture it. In the end the brute broke and fled.

The animal which had blocked their path in the rear had already disappeared.

Now the little man came back to face the fugitives, and his lips were parted in a cordial smile. He coiled his whip and tucked it under his arm. He was dressed in well worn corduroy with high boots that were rather the worse for wear. Bentley saw that his lips were too red—like blood—and somehow he disliked the man instantly.

"Welcome to Barterville," said the old man. "It has been years since I have seen any of my own kind. People avoid this section of the jungle."

"I don't wonder," said Bentley, sighing deeply with relief. "Those brutes would make anybody keep away from here, if they knew about them. I thought they had us for a few minutes. They planned an ambush almost as well as human beings could have done it—but that's absurd of course, merely a coincidence."

"Coincidence?" snapped the old man, a hint of asperity in his words. "Coincidence? I see you do not know the great apes, sir. I have always maintained that apes could be trained to do anything men can do. I have maintained that they have a language of their own, and even ways of communicating without words, a sort of jungle writing which men of course have never yet learned. I've devoted my life to learning the secrets of the great apes, their life histories, and so forth. I am Professor Caleb Barter!"

"Professor Caleb Barter!" ejaculated Ellen Estabrook. "Why I've heard of him! He went on an expedition among the great apes ten years ago and was never heard of again."

"I am Caleb Barter," said the old man. "I decided to

disappear from the world I knew, to let other fool scientists think me dead in order that I might continue my investigations without molestation. And now I have almost reached the place where I can go back to civilization with information that will startle the world. There yet remains one experiment. Now I hope to make that experiment. No! No! Don't ask me what it is. It is my secret and nobody will ever wrest it from me."

Bentley studied the old man. He seemed slightly demented, Bentley thought, but that might be merely the mental evolution of a man who had made a hermit of himself for so many years—if this chap actually were Professor Barter.

"Professor Barter," went on Ellen, "was the scientific leader of his day. Others followed where he led. He made greater strides in surgery and medicine, and in unravelling the mysteries of evolution, than anyone else up to his time. Of course I believe you are Professor Barter. My name is Ellen Estabrook, and this gentleman is Lee Bentley. We believe ourselves to be the only survivors of the Bengal Queen. Perhaps

you can lead us to food and water?"

"Yes, oh yes! Indeed. One forgets how to be hospitable, I fear. I am sorry to hear there was a wreck and that lives were lost—but it may mean a great gain to the world of science. I am happier to see you than you can possibly know!"

Bentley felt the cold chills racing along his spine as he listened to the old man's flow of words. He behaved well, but Bentley could feel in spite of that, that there was a hidden current of menace in the old man's behavior. He wished that Ellen would keep him talking, would somehow make sure of his identity. Perhaps the same thought was in her mind, for it had scarcely come to him when the girl spoke again.

"Before he disappeared Professor Barter wrote a learned treatise on—"

"I am Professor Barter, I tell you, young woman. But if you wish proof the title of the treatise was 'The Language of the Great Apes.'"

Ellen turned quickly to Bentley and nodded. She was satisfied that the man was the person he claimed to be. He didn't ask how Ellen happened to know about him, and Bentley himself considered the proof entirely lacking in conclusiveness. Anyone might know about the last treatise of Barter.

However, they could but await developments.

They followed Barter along the trail. Now and again apes challenged from the jungle, and Barter answered them with that strange laughter of his, or with a flow of gibberish that was like nothing human.

Bentley shivered. Barter, by his laughter, was identifying himself to the great anthropoids. But with his gibberish was he actually conversing with them?

"This experiment of yours," said Bentley when the period of silence became unbearable, "—won't you tell us about it?"

The old man cackled.

"You'll know all about it—soon! You'll know everything, but the secret will still rest with Caleb Barter. Do not be too curious, my friends."

"We are anxious to reach civilization, Professor," said Bentley, deciding to be placative with the old man.

"Perhaps you can arrange for guides for us?"

Barter laughed.

"I could not permit you to leave me for some time," he said. "I want you to witness my experiment. The world would never believe me without the evidence of reliable witnesses."

Barter laughed again.

They entered a clean clearing which was a riot of flowers. At the further edge was a log cabin of huge proportions. The whole thing had a decidedly homely appearance, but it was a welcome sight to the castaways. There were cages in which strange birds chattered shrilly in their own language at sight of the three. A pair of tame monkeys chased each other on

the roof of the house, whose corners were almost hidden by climbing vines whose growth one could almost see.

Barter led the way at a swift walk across the clearing and into the house.

Bentley gasped. Ellen Estabrook exclaimed with pleasure.

The reception room was as neat as though it received the hourly attentions of a fussy housewife. It was cozily furnished, yet it was evident that the furniture had been made on the spot of rough wood and skins of various animals. Deep skin rugs covered the floor and walls. There were three doors giving off of the reception room, all three of which were closed.

"You are not married?" he asked the two.

"No!" snapped Bentley.

"That center door leads to your room, Bentley. The one next to it is for the young lady. The other door?

Ah, the other door my friends! That door you must never open. But to make sure that curiosity does not overcome caution, let me show you!"

They followed him to the door. He swung it open.

Both visitors started back and a gasp of terror burst from the lips of Ellen Estabrook. Beads of perspiration burst forth on Bentley.

They saw a huge room. In one corner was a bed. The other held a great cage—and in the cage was an anthropoid ape larger even than the great brute they had met on the trail!

Barter laughed. He stepped into the room, uncoiled his whip and hurled the lash at the cage. A great bellowing roar fairly shook the house, while the brute tore at the bars which held him prisoner until the whole massive cage seemed to dance. Barter laughed and continued to goad him.

"Barter," yelled Bentley, "stop that! If that beast should ever happen accidentally to get free he'd tear

you to pieces!"

"I know," said Barter grimly, "and that's part of the experiment! Now we shall eat, and you, young lady, shall tell me what other fool scientists had to say about me after I disappeared—to escape their parrot-like repeating of my discoveries!"

Bentley started to offer protest as Barter began preparation for the meal, which obviously was to be taken in the room which held the cage of the giant anthropoid, but Ellen put her fingers to her lips and shook her head. Her eyes were dancing with excitement.

Chapter 3: A Night of Horror

The meal consisted of various fruits, some meat which Bentley could not identify, and wild honey which was delicious. The bread tasted queer but was distinctly edible. The castaways ate ravenously, but even as he ate Bentley noticed that Ellen's face was chalky pale, and that in spite of a distinct effort of will she simply had to look at intervals toward the great beast in the cage.

Caleb Barter sat with his back to the animal. Bentley sat at the left of the old scientist, Ellen Estabrook at his right. The great beast was quiet now, but he squatted within his prison and his red-rimmed eyes swerved from one person to the other in the room with a peculiar intentness.

"I'd swear that beast can almost read our thoughts!" ejaculated Bentley at last, after he had somewhat sated his appetite.

Barter smiled with those too-red lips of his.

"He can—almost. You'd be surprised to know how nearly human the great apes are, and how nearly human this particular one is. Ah!"

"What do you mean, this particular one?" asked Bentley curiously. "He doesn't look any different to me from the others I've seen except that he is far and away the largest."

"I don't see why you should be so curious," said Barter testily. "It's none of your business you know—yet."

"What do you mean?" demanded Bentley, nettled by Barter's tone.

"Lee, hush," said Ellen. "Professor Barter is not on trial for any crime."

Bentley looked at her in hurt surprise, inclined to be angry with her for the tone she was taking, but he saw such a look of appeal in her eyes that he choked back the words that rushed to his lips for utterance. He was decidedly on edge, more, he felt, than he

should have been despite what they had gone through. When their eyes met he saw her glance quickly toward the ape, and noted a frown of worry between her brows.

Bentley glanced at the ape. The brute now was staring at the girl in a way that made Bentley's flesh crawl. It was preposterous of course, but he had the feeling, something which seemed to flow out of that mighty cage like some evil emanation from a dank tarn, that the ape knew the girl's sex—and that he desired her! It was horrible in the extreme to contemplate, yet Bentley knew when he glanced swiftly at the girl that she had sensed the same thing and was fighting to keep the natural horror she felt at such a ghastly thought from being noticeable. It was absurd. The ape was a prisoner. But....

"Professor Barter," said Bentley, "you're accustomed to being with this brute, but it isn't so nice for us, especially for Miss Estabrook."

Barter now frowned angrily.

"My dear Bentley," he said with that odd testiness which he had assumed toward Bentley before, "I refuse to have any interference with my experiment. This is part of it."

"You mean—" began Bentley.

"I mean that I'm training that ape—I call him Manape—to behave like human beings. How better can he learn than by watching our behavior?"

"Just the same," said Bentley, "I don't like it."

"It's all right, Lee," said Ellen quickly. "I don't mind."

But Bentley knew that it wasn't all right, and that she did mind, terribly.

Barter finished eating. Bentley had noticed that despite the long years he had been a virtual hermit, Barter ate as fastidiously as he probably had done when he had lived among his own kind. He pushed back his chair with a swift movement.

Instantly the roaring of Manape rang through the room. The great brute rose to his full height and grasped the bars of his cage, shaking them with savage fury. He glared at his master and bestial rage glittered from his red-rimmed eyes. He was a horrible sight. Ellen Estabrook, with no apology, stepped around the table and crouched wide-eyed in the arm of Lee Bentley.

"Lee," she said, "I'm terribly afraid. I almost wish we had trusted ourselves in the jungle."

"I'll look out for you," he whispered, as Barter turned his attention to the great ape.

But Bentley was watching the animal. So was Barter. The eyes of the scientist were shining like coals of fire. For the moment he appeared to have forgotten his guests.

"It is a success!" he cried. "As far as it goes, I mean!"

What did Barter mean? Seeking some answer to the enigma, Bentley studied the ape anew. Now he was

positive of another thing: Manape was scarcely concerned with Barter, whom he appeared to hate with an utterly satanic hatred. His beady eyes were staring at Bentley instead!

"The brute is jealous of me!" thought Bentley. "Good God, what does it mean, anyway?"

Barter turned back to them and all at once became the genial host.

"Shall we return to the other room?" he asked politely.

It was a relief to the castaways to put that awful room behind them. Barter closed and barred the door with deliberate slowness.

Why had this old man shut himself away from civilization like this? How long had he held this great ape in captivity? What was the purpose of it? What experiment was he performing? What part of it had the castaways been witnessing that they had not recognized? Bentley, recalling the distinct impression that the ape had stared at Ellen almost with the eyes

of a lustful man, and had even appeared to be jealous of him because the girl had gone into his arms— Bentley felt a shiver of revulsion course through him as it struck him now how human the regard and the jealousy of the creature had been!

He felt like clutching at the girl and racing with her into the hazards of the jungle. But he remembered the anthropoids out there, and Barter's peculiar domination of the brutes.

Barter was now watching the two with interest, studying them in turn speculatively, unmindful of the impertinence of his studious regard and silence.

"I have it!" he said. "Will you two be good enough to excuse me? You will need rest, I am sure. I am going away for a little time, but I shall return shortly after dark. Make yourselves at home. But remember—don't enter that room!"

"You need not worry," said Bentley grimly. "I sincerely hope we take our next meal in some other room."

Barter laughed and passed out of the door without a backward glance.

From the jungle immediately afterward came the drumming of the great apes, and now and again the laughter of Barter—high-pitched at first, but dying away as Barter apparently moved off into the jungle.

"Ellen," said Bentley quickly, "I don't know what's going on here, but I'm sure it's something sinister and awful. Let's take a look at our rooms. If there isn't a door between them which can be left open, then you'll have to spend the night in my room while I remain awake on guard."

"I was thinking of the same thing, Lee," she whispered. "This place gives me the horrors. Barter's association with the apes is a terrible thing."

Hand in hand they stepped to the door Barter had designated as that of Ellen Estabrook's. Bentley opened it cautiously, heaving a sigh of relief to find it empty. He scarcely knew what he had expected. There was a connecting door between the two rooms,

open, and they peered into the chamber Bentley was to occupy.

Back they came to her room, to stand before a window which gave onto a shadowed little clearing in the rear of the cabin.

"Look!" whispered Ellen.

There was a single mound of earth, with a white cross set over it, on which was the single word: Mangor.

It might have been a word in some native dialect. It might have been some native's name. It might have been anything, but, whatever it was, it added to the sinister atmosphere which seemed to hang like an evil mist over the home of Caleb Barter.

"That settles it, Ellen," he said. "You'll spend the night in my room."

Ellen retired in Bentley's room, closing the door which led to the adjoining room, and Bentley walked back and forth in the reception room, waiting for

Barter to return. When darkness fell he lighted the lamps he had previously located. Their odor caused him to guess that the fuel they used was some sort of animal fat. In the strange glow from the lamps, his shadow on the walls, as he walked to and fro, was grotesque, terrible—and at times a grim reminder of the great apes. It caused him to consider how, after all, human beings were akin to gorillas and chimpanzees. Somehow, now, it was a horrible thought.

The night wore on and Bentley's stride became faster. Now and again he peered into the girl's room. She was sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion and he did not waken her. Bentley felt it was near midnight when Barter returned, his return heralded by a strange commotion in the clearing, and the frightful drumming of the great apes—or at least one great ape. Bentley shuddered as the animal behind the locked door answered the drumming challenge with a drumming thunder of his own.

Barter came in, and Bentley accosted him at once.

"See here, Barter," he began. "I don't like it here. There's something strange going on in this clearing. Miss Estabrook and I wish to leave immediately in the morning! And that grave behind the cabin, who or what is it?"

Barter studied the almost trembling Bentley for all of a minute.

"That grave?" he said at last, with silken softness. "It's the grave of a jungle savage. He died in the interest of science. As for you, you'll leave here when I bid you, and not before, understand? I've a guardian outside that would tear both of you limb from limb."

But Bentley caught and held fast to certain words the scientist had spoken.

"The savage died in the interest of science?" he said. "What do you mean?"

Barter smiled his red-lipped smile.

"I took the savage and Manape, who wasn't called

Manape then, and administered an anesthetic of my own invention. You've heard that I was a master of trephining? No matter if you haven't heard, the whole world will know soon! While the native and the ape were under anesthesia I transferred their brains. I put the black man's brain in the skull pan of the ape, and the ape's brain in that of the savage. The ape lived—and he is Manape. The savage, with the ape's brain, died, and I buried him in that grave you asked about!"

With a cry of horror Bentley turned and fled from Barter as though the man had been His Satanic Majesty himself. He entered the room with Ellen and barred the door behind him. He likewise barred the door which led to that other room. Now in total darkness it was all he could do from clambering on the bed where Ellen slept, and begging her to touch him—anything—if only to prove to him that there still were sane creatures left in a mad world.

Outside Barter laughed.

"Oh, Bentley," he called after a long interval of silence, "do you like the odor of violets? Goodnight,

and pleasant dreams!"

What had Barter meant?

Again assuring himself that the connecting door could not be opened if anything or anybody tried to enter that way, Bentley flung himself down before the door which gave on the reception room. He had no intention of sleeping. But in spite of himself he dozed off, though he fought against sleep with all his will.

Strange, but as he gradually slipped away into unconsciousness he was cognizant of the odor of violets—like invisible tentacles which reached through the very door and wrapped themselves gently about him.

His last conscious thought was of Manape, the ape with the brain of a jungle savage. But in spite of the vague feeling of horror he could not fight off the desire for sleep.

Chapter 4: Grim Awakening

Bentley returned to consciousness with a dull headache. He rose to a sitting posture and looked dully about him. Dimwittedly he tried to recall all that had passed since he had last been awake. He knew he had gone to sleep under the door in the room where Ellen had slept. Yet he was not there now. He peered about him.

He recognized the room.

Yonder was the table where they had eaten last night, or yesterday afternoon. Yonder was the bed he guessed Barter customarily used, and he shuddered a little as he fancied a man sleeping in the same room with that ghastly travesty which was neither ape nor human—Manape. The creature's name was simple, being simply "man" and "ape" joined together to fit the creature perfectly—too perfectly. Barter's bed had been slept in, but Barter was nowhere to be seen. Where was he? How came Bentley in this room? Barter had forbidden him to enter the place at all, on any pretext whatever. Had he walked in his sleep,

drawn by some freak of his subconscious mind into the room of Manape?

Slowly, afraid to look yet forced by something outside himself, he turned his eyes toward the corner where the beast's cage was.

The cage was empty!

The door of it was open!

Stunned by his discovery, wondering what had happened during the night, Bentley looked about him. He noticed the long narrow table at the end of the cage, and the white covering it bore. He recognized it instantly as an operating table, and wondered afresh.

Where was Barter?

Bentley raised his voice to shout the scientist's name. But before he could himself recognize the syllables of the scientist's name, through the whole room rang the bellowing challenge of a giant anthropoid ape.

Bentley cowered down fearfully and looked around

him. Where was the ape that had uttered that frightful noise? The sound had broken in that very room, yet save for himself the room was empty.

Bentley turned his head as he heard someone fumbling with the door.

Barter entered, and his face was a study as his eyes met those of Bentley. Bentley noticed that Barter held that whip in his hand, uncoiled and ready for action.

What was this that Barter was saying?

"I warn you, Bentley, that if anything happens to me you are doomed. If I am killed it means a horrible end for you."

Bentley tried to answer him, tried to speak, but something appeared to have gone wrong with his vocal cords, so that all that came from his lips was a senseless gibberish that meant nothing at all. He recalled the odor of violets, Barter's enigmatic good-night utterance with reference to violets, and wondered if their odor, stealing into the room where

he had gone on guard over Ellen, had had anything to do with paralyzing his powers of speech.

"I see you haven't discovered, Bentley," said Barter after a moment of searching inspection of Bentley. "Look at yourself!"

Surprised at this puzzling command, Bentley slowly looked down at his chest. It was broad and hairy, huge as a mighty barrel, and his arms hung to the floor, the hands half closed as though they grasped something. Horror held Bentley mute for a moment. Then he raised his eyes to Barter, to note that the scientist was smiling and rubbing his hands with immense satisfaction.

Bentley started across the floor toward a mirror near Barter's bed. He refused to let his numbed brain dwell upon the instant recognition of his manner of progress. For he moved across the floor with a peculiar rolling gait, aiding his stride with the bent knuckles of his hands pressed against the floor.

He fought against the horror that gripped him. He

feared to look into the mirror, yet knew that he must. He reached it, reared to his full height, and gazed into the glass—at the reflection of Manape, the great ape of the cage!

Instantly a murderous fury possessed him. He whirled on Barter, to scream out at the man, to beg him to explain what had happened, why this ghastly hallucination gripped him. But all he could do was bellow, and smash his mighty chest with his fists, so that the sound went crashing out across the jungle—to be answered almost at once by the drumming of other mighty anthropoids outside, beyond the clearing which held the awful cabin of Caleb Barter.

He started toward Barter, still bellowing and beating his chest. His one desire was to clutch the scientist and tear him limb from limb, and he knew that his mighty arms were capable of ripping the scientist apart as though Barter had been a fly.

"Back, you fool!" snarled Barter. "Back, I say!"

The long lash of the whip cracked like a revolver shot,

and the lash curled about the chest and neck of Bentley. It ripped and tore like a hot iron. It struck again and again. Bentley could not stand the awful beating the scientist was giving him. In spite of all his power he found himself being forced back and back.

He stepped into the cage, cowered back against its side. Barter darted in close, shut the door and fastened it. Then he stood against the bars, grinning.

"Nod your head if you can understand me, Bentley," he said.

Bentley nodded.

"I told you I would yet prove to the world the greatness of Caleb Barter," said the scientist. "And you will bear witness that what I have to tell is true. Would you like to know what I have done?"

Again, slowly and laboriously, Bentley nodded his shaggy head.

Barter grinned.

"Wonderful!" he said. "You see, you are now Manape. Yesterday you had the brain of a black man, and to exchange your brain with Manape's of yesterday would not have served my purpose in the least. So I had to find an ape of more than average intelligence. That's why I spent so much time in the jungle yesterday. I needed a brain to put in the body of Lee Bentley's—an ape's brain. Your body is a healthy one and I did not think it would die as the savage's did. I was right. It is doing splendidly. It would interest you to see how your body behaves with an ape's brain to direct it. Your other self, whom I call Apeman, is unusually handsome. Miss Estabrook, however, who does not know what has happened, has taken a strange dislike to the other you! Splendid! I shall study reactions at first hand that will astound the world!

"But remember, whatever your fine brain dictates that you do, don't ever forget that I am the only living person who can put you to rights again—and if I die before that happens, you will continue on, till you die, as Manape!"

Barter stopped there. Bentley stiffened.

From the room where he knew Ellen Estabrook to be came her voice, raised high in a shout of fear.

"Lee! Please! I can't understand you. Please don't touch me! Your eyes burn me—please go away. What in the world has come over you?"

Bentley listened for the reply of the creature he knew was in the other room with Ellen Estabrook.

But the answer was a gurgling gibberish that made no sense at all! His own body, directed by the brain of an ape, could not emit speech that Ellen could understand, because the ape could not speak. The ape's vocal cords, which now were Bentley's, were incapable of speech.

How, if Barter continued to keep Ellen in ignorance of what had happened, would she ever know the horrible truth—and realize the danger that threatened her?

"Don't worry for the moment, Bentley," said Barter

with a smile. "I am not yet ready for your other self to go to undue lengths—though I dislike intensely to leave the marks of my whip on that handsome body of yours!"

Barter slipped from the room.

Bentley listened, amazed at the clarity with which he heard every vagrant little sound—until he remembered again that his hearing was that of a jungle beast—until he knew that Barter had entered that other room.

Then came the crackling reports of the whip, wielded mightily by the hands of Barter.

A scream that was half human, half animal, was the result of the lashing. Bentley cringed as he imagined the bite of that lash which he himself had experienced but a few moments before.

"Professor Barter! Professor Barter!" distinctly came the voice of Ellen Estabrook. "Don't! Don't! He didn't mean anything, I am sure. He is sick, something

dreadful has happened to him. But he wouldn't really hurt me. He couldn't—not really. Stop, please! Don't strike him again!"

But the sound of the lash continued.

"Stop, I tell you!" Ellen's voice rose to a cry of agonized entreaty. "Don't strike him again. See, you've ripped his flesh until he is covered with blood! Strike me if you must strike someone—for with all my heart and soul I love him!"

Chapter 5: Fumbling Hands

Now Bentley was beginning to realize to the full the horrible thing that had befallen himself and Ellen Estabrook. He knew something else, too. It had come to him when he had heard Ellen's words next door—telling Barter that she loved the creature Barter was beating, which she thought was Lee Bentley. That creature was Lee Bentley; but only the earthly casement of Lee Bentley. The ruling power of Bentley's body, the driving force which actuated his body, was the brain of an ape.

As for Bentley himself, that part of him of which he thought when he thought of "I," to all intents and purposes, to all outer seeming, had become an ape. His body was an ape's body, his legs were an ape's, everything about him was simian save one thing—the "ego," that something by which man knows that he is himself, with an individual identity. That was buried behind the almost non-existent brow of an ape.

In all things save one he was an ape. That thing was "Bentley's" brain. In all things save one that creature

in the room with Ellen Estabrook was Bentley.
Bentley, driven to mad behavior by the brain of an
ape!

The horror of it tore at Bentley, as he still thought of
himself.

"If I were to get out of this cage," he told himself
voicelessly, "and were to enter that room with Ellen,
she would cower into a corner in terror. She would fly
to the arms of that travesty of 'me,' for she thinks it is
'I' in there with her because it looks like me."

Now that Ellen was beyond his reach, more beyond
his reach than if she had been dead, he realized how
much she meant to him. In the few mad hours of their
association they had come to belong to each other
with a possessiveness that was beyond words.
Thinking then that the travesty in there with her—
with Bentley's body—was really Bentley, to what
lengths might she not be persuaded in her love? It
was a ghastly thing to contemplate.

But what could Bentley do? He could not speak to her.

If he tried she would race from him in terror at the bellowing ferocity of his voice. How could he tell her his love when his voice was such as to frighten the very wild beasts of the jungle?

Yet....

How could he allow her to remain with that other Bentley—that body which perhaps was provided with a man's appetites, and the brain of a beast which knew nothing of honor and took what it wished if it were strong enough?

There was one ray of hope in that Barter had hinted he would protect Ellen from the apeman. That meant physically, with all that might indicate; but who could compensate her for the horror she must be experiencing with that speechless imbecile she thought was Bentley? If this thing were to continue indefinitely, and Ellen were kept in ignorance, she would eventually grow to hate the "thing"—and if ever, as he had hinted, Barter were to transfer back the entities of the man and the ape, Ellen would always shudder with horrible memories when she

looked at the man she had just now admitted she loved.

Bentley was becoming calmer now. He knew exactly what he faced, and there was no way out until Barter should be satisfied with his mad experiment. Bentley must go through with whatever was in store for him. So must the ape who possessed his body—and in the very nature of things unless Bentley could train himself to a self-saving docility, both bodies would repeatedly know the fiery stinging of that lash of Barter's. Bentley could control himself after a fashion. The ape might be cowed, but long before that time arrived, Bentley's body would be made to suffer marks they would bear forever to remind him of this horror.

"I must somehow manage to continue to care for Ellen," he told himself. "But how?"

He scarcely realized that his great hands were wandering over his body, scratching, scratching. But when he did realize he felt sick, without being able to understand how or where he felt sick. If he felt sick at

the stomach he thought of it as his own stomach. When he thought of moving the hairy hands he thought of his hands. He grinned to himself—never realizing the horrible grimace which crossed his face, though there was none to see it—when he recalled how men of his acquaintance during the Great War, had complained of aching toes at the end of legs that had been amputated!

He was learning one thing—that the brain is everything that matters. The seat of pain and pleasure, of joy and of sorrow, of hunger and of thirst even.

Bentley waddled to the door of the cage. He studied the lock which held him prisoner, and noted how close he must hold his face to see at all. All apes might be near-sighted as far as he knew; but he did know that this one was. Perhaps he could free himself.

He tried to force his massive hands to the task of investigating the lock. But what an effort! It was like trying to hypnotize a subject that did not wish to be hypnotized. A distinct effort of will, like trying to force

someone to turn and look by staring at the back of that someone's neck in a crowd. It was like trying to make an entirely different person move his arm, or his leg, merely by willing that he move it.

But the great arms, which might have weighed tons, though Bentley sensed no strain, raised to the door and fumbled dumbly, clumsily. He tried to close the gnarled fingers, whose backs were covered with the rough hair, to manipulate the lock, but he succeeded merely in fumbling—like a baby senselessly tugging at its father's fingers, the existence of which had no shape or form in the baby's brain.

But he strove with all his will to force those clumsy hands to do his bidding. They slipped from the lock, went back again, fumbled over it, fell away.

"You must!" muttered Bentley. "You must, you must!"

He would discover the secret of the lock, so that he would be able to remove it when the time was right—but so slow and uncertain and clumsy were the movements of his ape hands, he was in mortal fear

that he would unlock the door and then not be able to lock it again, and Barter would discover what he had in mind.

But he struggled on, while foul smelling sweat poured from his mighty body and dripped to the floor. He concentrated on the lock with all his power, knowing as he did so that the lock would have been but a simple problem for a child of six or seven. It was nothing more than a bar held in place with a leather thong. But the powerful fingers which now were Bentley's were too blunt and inflexible to master the knot Barter had left.

Bentley paused to listen.

From Ellen's room came the sound of weeping. From the front room came Barter's pleased laughter as he talked with the thing which so much resembled Bentley. That was a relief—to know that his other self had been at least temporarily removed from any possibility of injuring Ellen.

In Bentley's mind were certain pictures of Barter. He

saw him plainly on his knees begging for mercy, while Bentley's ape hands choked his life away. He saw him tossed about like a mere child, and casually torn apart, ripped limb from limb by the mighty hands of Manape.

"God," he told himself, refusing to listen to the slobbering gibberish which came from his thick lips when he addressed himself, "I can do nothing to Barter—not until he restores me properly. If he is slain, it is the end for me, and for Ellen! He is a master, no doubt of that. He anesthetized me through the door with something of his own manufacture that smelled like violets, and put my brain in Manape after removing from Manape the brain of the savage. Then he removed an ape's brain from a second ape and put it in my skull pan—all within the space of a few hours! Yet his knowledge of surgery and medicine is such that even in so short a time I suffer little from the operation, save for the dull headache which I had on awakening, and which I now scarcely feel at all."

He straightened, close against the bars, and began again to fumble with the leather thong which held

him prisoner. In his brain was the hazy idea that he might after all make a break for it, and carry Ellen away to a place of safety, taking a chance on finding his way back here to force Barter to operate again and restore him to his proper place. But would not Ellen die of fright at being borne away through the jungle in the arms of an ape? Was there any possibility of forcing Barter to perform the operation? No, for under the anesthetic again, Barter, angered by the thwarting of whatever purpose actuated him, might do something even worse than he had done—if that were possible. Again, even if he reached civilisation with Ellen, every human hand would be turned against him. Rifles would hurl their lead into him. Hunters would pursue him....

No, it was impossible.

Bentley, Ellen, and the Apeman—his own body, ape-brained—were but pawns in the hands of Barter. Barter might be actuated by a desire to serve science, that science which was alike his tool and his god. Bentley scarcely doubted that Barter believed himself specially ordained to do this thing, in the name of

science; probably, unquestionably, felt himself entirely justified.

Plainly, now that Bentley recalled things Barter had said, Barter had waited for an opportunity of this kind—had waited for someone to be tossed into his net—and Ellen and Lee, flotsam of the sea, had come in answer to the prayer for whose answer Barter had waited.

It was horrible, yet there was nothing they could do—at least, to free themselves—until it pleased Barter to take the step. It came then to Bentley how precious to them both was the life of Caleb Barter. He could restore Bentley or destroy him—and with him the woman who loved him.

Suppose, came Bentley's sudden thought, Barter should think of performing a like operation on Ellen—using in the transfer the brain of a female ape? God!...

He prayed that the thought would never come to Barter. He was afraid to dwell upon it lest Barter read his thought. He might think of it naturally, as a simple

corollary to what he had already done. Bentley then must do something before Barter planned some new madness.

He sat back and bellowed savagely, beating his chest with his mighty hands.

Instantly the outer door opened and Barter came in.

Bentley ceased his bellowing and chest pounding and sat docilely there, staring into the eyes of Barter.

"Have you discovered there is no use opposing me, Bentley?" said the professor softly.

Bentley nodded his shaggy head. Then by a superhuman effort of will he raised the right arm of Manape and pointed. He could not point the forefinger, but he could point the arm—and look in the direction he desired.

"You want to come out and go into the front room?"

Bentley nodded.

"You will make no attempt to injure me?"

Bentley shook his head ponderously from side to side.

"You would like to see the Apeman?—the creature that looks so much like you that it will be like peering at yourself in the mirror? Or, rather, as it would have been yesterday had you looked into a mirror?"

Bentley nodded slowly.

"You understand that no matter what the Apeman does, you must not try to slay him?"

Bentley did not move.

"You understand if you destroy Apeman's body, you are doomed to remain Manape forever, because the true body of Lee Bentley will die and be eventually destroyed?"

Bentley nodded. He felt a trickle of moisture on the rough skin about his flaring nostrils and knew that he was weeping, soundlessly.

But there was no pity in the face of Barter. He was the scientist who studied his science, to whom it was the breath of life, and he saw nothing, thought of nothing, not directly connected with his "experiment."

"You give me your word of honor as a gentleman not to oppose me?"

It was odd, an almost superhumanly intellectual scientist asking for an ape's word of honor, but that did not occur to Bentley at the moment, as he nodded his head.

Barter still held his lash poised. He unfastened the leather thong which held Bentley prisoner and swung wide the door. Then he turned his back on Bentley and led the way to the door.

Bentley followed him on mighty feet and bent knuckles into the room which had first received Lee and Ellen when they had entered the cabin of the scientist.

Bentley would have gasped had he been capable of

gasping at what he saw.

In a far corner, cowering down in fear at sight of Barter and his coiled whip—was the Bentley of the mirror in his stateroom aboard the Bengal Queen, and before that.

It was an uncanny sensation, to stand off and peer at himself thus.

Yonder was Bentley, yet here was Bentley, too.

Then he noted the difference. The face of that Bentley yonder was twisted, savage. That Bentley had seen Manape, and the teeth were exposed in a snarl of savage hatred. There a man ape stared at another man ape, and bared his fangs in challenge. The white hands of Bentley began to beat the white chest of Bentley—to beat the chest savagely, until the white skin was red as blood....

The Bentley buried within the mighty carcass of an anthropoid ape watched and shuddered. That thing yonder was dressed only in a breech-clout, and the

fair flesh was criss-crossed in scores of places with bleeding wounds left by the lash of Barter. The Apeman's brows were furrowed in concentration. The human body made ape-like movements.

Bentley knew that soon that creature, forgetting everything save that he faced a rival man ape, would charge and attempt to measure the power of Manape—fang against fang. The white form rose.

Barter caused his whiplash to crack like an explosion.

"One moment," he said. "Back, Apeman! I'll bring Miss Estabrook. Perhaps she can placate you. She has a strange power over you both!"

Bentley would have cried out as Barter crossed to unlock Ellen's door, but he knew that he could not stop Barter, and that his cry would simply be a terrible bellow to frighten the woman he loved when she entered the room.

The door opened. White, shaken, her eyes deep wells of terror, circled with blue rings which told the effect

of the horror she had experienced, Ellen Estabrook entered.

And screamed with terror as she saw the hulking figure of Manape. Screamed with terror and rushed to the arms of the cowering thing in the corner!

Chapter 6: Puppets of Barter

The thing that Barter then contrived was destined to remain forever in the memory of Bentley as the most ghastly thing he had ever experienced. Ellen hurried into the arms of that thing in the corner. Gropingly, protectively, the white arms encompassed her. But they were awkward, uncertain, and Bentley was minded of a female ape or monkey holding her young against her hairy bosom.

Barter turned toward Bentley and smiled. He rubbed his hands together with satisfaction.

"A success so far, my experiment," he said. "The human body still answers to primal urges, which are closely enough allied to those of our simian cousins that their outward manifestations—manual gestures, expressions in the eyes et cetera—are much the same. When the two are combined the action approximates humanness!"

That travesty yonder pressed its face against Ellen, and she drew back, her eyes wide as they met those

of the white figure which held her.

"I am all right," she managed, "please don't hold me so tightly."

She tried to struggle away, but Apeman held her helpless.

"Barter," yelled Bentley, "take her away from that thing! How can you do such a horrible thing?"

At least those were the words he intended to shout, but the sound that came from his lips was the bellowing of a man ape. That other thing yonder answered his bellow, bared white teeth in a bestial snarl. Barter turned to Bentley, however.

"You want me to take her away from Bentley and give her to you?"

Bentley nodded.

His bellowing attempt at speech had sent Ellen closer into the arms of Bentley's other self—henceforth to be

known as Apeman. Bentley had defeated his own purpose by his bellow.

"Miss Estabrook," said Barter softly, "nothing will happen to you if you stand clear of your sweetheart...."

Nausea gripped Bentley as he heard Apeman referred to as Ellen's sweetheart, but now he remembered to refrain from attempting speech.

"But," went on Barter, "Manape has taken a violent dislike to Bentley, and may attack him if you do not stand clear. Manape likes you, you know. You probably sensed that last evening?"

Ellen visibly shuddered. She patted the shoulder of Apeman and stepped away, toward a chair which Barter thrust toward her.

She pressed her hands to her throbbing temples, visibly fighting to control herself. Her whole body was trembling as with the ague.

"Professor Barter," she said at last. "I am terribly confused, and most awfully frightened. What has happened here? What dreadful thing has so awfully changed Lee? I talk to him and he answers nothing that I understand. Is it some weird fever? At this moment I have the feeling that that brute Manape understands more perfectly than Lee, and the idea is horrible! I love Lee, Professor. See, he hears me say it, yet I cannot tell from his expression what he thinks. Does he despise me for so freely admitting my love? Has he any feeling about it at all? Has his mind completely gone?"

"Yes," said Barter, with a semblance of a smile on his lips, "his mind has completely gone. But it is only temporary, my dear. You forget that I am perhaps the world's greatest living medical man, and that I can do things no other man can do. I shall restore Lee wholly to you—when the time comes. It is not well to hasten things in cases of this kind. One never knows but that great harm may be done."

"But I can nurse him. I can care for him and love him, and help to make him well."

Barter looked away from Ellen, his eyes apparently focussed on a spot somewhere in the air between Apeman and Manape.

"Would that be satisfactory to Bentley, I wonder?" he said musingly, yet Bentley recognized it as a question addressed to him. Bentley looked at the girl, but her eyes were fixed—alight with love which was still filled with questioning—on Apeman. Bentley shook his head, and Barter laughed a little.

"You know, Miss Estabrook," he went on, "that a strange malady like that which appears to have attacked Lee Bentley should be studied carefully, in order that the observations of a savant may be given to the world so that such maladies may be effectually combatted in future. This is one reason why I do not hasten."

"But you are using a sick man as you would use a rabbit in a laboratory experiment!" she cried. "Can't you see that there are things not even you should do? Don't you understand that some things should be left entirely in the hands of God?"

"I do not concede that!" retorted Barter. "God makes terrible mistakes sometimes—as witness cretins, mongoloid idiots, criminals, and the like. I know about these things better than you do, my dear, and you must trust me."

"Oh, if I only knew what was right. Poor Lee. You lashed him so, and his body is awful with the scars. Was that necessary?"

"Insane persons are not to blame for their insanity," said Barter soothingly. "Yet sometimes they must be handled roughly to prevent them from causing loss of life, their own or others."

Now the eyes of Ellen came to rest on Manape.

They were fear filled at first, especially when she discovered that the little red eyes of Manape were upon her. But she did not turn her eyes away, nor did Manape. She seemed dazed, unable to orient herself, unable to distinguish the proper mode of action.

"That ape in repose is almost human," she said

wearily, her brow puckered as though she sought the answer to some unspoken question that eluded her. "I am not afraid of him at this moment, yet I know that in a second he can become an invincible brute, capable of tearing us all limb from limb."

"Not so long as I have this whip," said Barter grimly. "But Manape is docile at the moment, and it is Bentley who is ferocious."

Apeman was still snarling at Manape, lending point to Barter's statement. Barter went on.

"You know," he said, "apes are almost human in many respects. Manape likes you, and I doubt if he would attempt to hurt you. If he knew that you cared for Bentley there, he would most assuredly try to be friendly to Bentley also. Perhaps you can manage it. Apes are capable of primitive reasoning, you know. Go to Manape. He won't injure you, at least while I am here. Stroke him. He will like it. He is a friend worth having, never fear, and one never knows when one may need a friend—or what sort of friend one may need."

Ellen hesitated, and her face whitened again.

Barter went on.

"Go ahead. It is necessary that Manape and Bentley remain here together for a time. Manape will be locked up, but if he happens to break loose there is nothing he might not do. With Bentley in the condition he is he would be no match for Manape. But if Manape thought you desired his friendship for Bentley...?"

There he left it, while Bentley wondered what new horror Barter was planning. He yearned for Ellen to come to him. But, if he strode toward her now, how would Barter explain that Manape had understood his words? No, Ellen must take the step, and each one would be hesitant, as she fought against her natural revulsion at touching this great shaggy creature which was Manape to her, and Bentley to himself.

Slowly, almost against her will, Ellen rose and moved across the floor toward Bentley. Apeman growled ominously. He rose to his feet, his arms writhing like

disjoined, broken-backed snakes across his scarred chest.

Apeman took a step forward. Barter did not notice, apparently, for he was watching Manape as Ellen approached.

She came quite close. Slowly she put forth her hand to touch the shaggy shoulder of Manape. Bentley, seeking some way, any way, to reassure her, put his great shaggy right arm about her waist for the merest second.

Then Apeman charged, bellowing a shrill crescendo that was half human, half simian.

Before Bentley could realize Apeman's intentions, Apeman had clutched Ellen about the waist and dashed for the door of the cabin. He was gone, racing across the clearing with swift strides, bearing the girl with him.

Bentley whirled to pursue, but Barter had beaten him to the door and now blocked it, whiplash writhing,

twisting, curling to strike.

"Back, Bentley! Back, I say! In a moment you may follow—as part of my experiment. But remember—the end must be here in this cabin, and you must remember everything, so that you can tell me all—when you are restored!"

Bentley cowered under the lash. His whole shaggy body trembled frightfully.

From the jungle toward which Apeman was racing come the roaring challenge of half a dozen anthropoids.

Chapter 7: Lord of the Jungle

Apeman, never realizing that his actual strength was that of but a puny human being, was racing with Ellen Estabrook into the very midst of animals which would tear him to bits as easily as they would tear any human being to pieces. Apeman, being but an ape after all, would merely think that he was joining his own kind, bearing with him a mate with white skin.

But to the other apes he would be a human being, a puny hairless imitation of themselves which they would pounce upon and tear asunder with great glee. Apeman would not know this: would not realize his limitations. He would try to take to the upper terraces of the jungle, to swing from tree to tree, carrying his mate—and would find the body of Bentley incapable of supporting such an effort. Apeman would be a child in the hands of his brethren, who could not know him. Apeman could probably speak to them after a fashion, but his gibberish would come strangely perhaps unintelligibly, through the mouth of Bentley. They would suspect him, and destroy him, and with him Ellen Estabrook, unless other apes discovered also

her sex and took her, fighting over her among themselves.

Bentley made good time across the jungle clearing. Behind him came the voice of Barter in final exhortation.

"Your human cunning, hampered by your simian body, pitted against the highly specialized body of your former self, in turn hampered by the lack of reasoning of an ape—in a contest in primitive surrounding for a female! A glorious experiment, and all depends now upon you! You will save the girl who loves you and whom you love, but you must return to me and be transferred before you can make your love known. I shall wait for you!"

In Bentley's brain the shouted words of Barter rang as he hurried into the jungle in pursuit of Apeman. Ellen Estabrook was crying: "Hurry, Lee, hurry!"

Yet she was really yelling to Apeman, the man-beast which carried her, bidding him race on to escape the pursuit of Manape, in whom she would never

recognize the man she loved. She must have thought that Bentley had taken a desperate chance to escape the clutches of Barter, and that Barter had set his trained ape to pursue them. What else could she think? How could she know that she was actually in the power of an ape, and that her loved one actually pursued to save her? With every desire of her body she was urging Apeman to take her away from Manape. But she must also have heard the challenges of the man apes in the jungle ahead. She was looking back over Apeman's shoulder, wondering perhaps if Barter would again come out to save them from the anthropoids.

Bentley could guess at her thoughts as he raced on in pursuit of Apeman.

Would he be in time? Even if he were, Apeman himself would turn against him. If he were to try to aid Ellen she would fight against him, believing him an ape. And how could he fight? Would his brain be able to direct his mighty arms and his fighting fangs in a battle with the apes of the jungle?

As he thought of coming to grips with the apes on equal terms, something never in this world before vouchsafed to a human being, he felt a fierce exaltation upon him. He felt a desire to take part in mortal combat with them, to fight them fist and fang, and to destroy them, one by one. He had their strength and more—he had the cunning of a human being to match against the dim wits of the apes. He had a chance.

But he must protect not only Ellen, but Apeman. Both Ellen and Apeman would be against him. Ellen would fear him as an ape that desired her. Apeman would fight against him as a rival for the favors of a she....

And he must harm neither. His own body, which Apeman directed, must be spared, must be kept alive—while every effort of Apeman would be to force Bentley to slay!

It was a predicament which—well, only Caleb Barter had foreseen it.

The bellowing of the apes was a continuous roar on

all sides now. Bentley felt a fierce sensation of joy welling up within him and he answered their bellowing with savage bellows of his own. His legs were obeying his will. His knuckles touched the ground as he raced on all fours.

He could hear the shriek of Ellen there ahead, and knew that Apeman and the girl were surrounded—that he must make all possible speed if he were to be in time.

Apeman and his captive were on the trail, trapped there just as Apeman had started into the jungle. Apeman had lifted Ellen so that her hands might have grasped a limb; but the girl had refused to attempt to escape by the trees if her "lover" remained behind. She had crumpled to the ground, and Apeman, snarling, smashing his chest which was so sickly white as compared to the chests of the other apes, had turned upon his brethren. They hesitated for a moment as though amazed at the effrontery of this mere human.

Then a man ape charged. Apeman met him with arms

and fangs, and Bentley saw Apeman's all too small mouth snap out for the vein in the neck of Apeman's attacker. The ape whose brain reposed in Apeman had been a courageous beast, that was plain. But he was fighting for his she.

And he did not know his limitations. Apeman was bowled over as though he had been a blade of grass, and the great ape was crouched over him, nuzzling at his white flesh when Bentley-Manape arrived.

With a savage bellow, and with a mighty lunge, Bentley leaped upon the attacker of Apeman. His arms obeyed him with more certainty now, perhaps because the matter was so vitally urgent. Bentley's brain knew jiu-jitsu, boxing, ways of rough and tumble fighting of which the great apes had never learned, nor ever would learn.

He hurled himself upon the animal that was on the point of pulling Apeman apart as though he had indeed been a fly, and literally flattened him against the ground. His mighty hands searched for the throat of the great ape, while he instinctively pulled his

stomach out of the way of possible disemboweling tactics on the part of his antagonist. But the great ape twisted from his grasp, struggled erect.

And, amazed at what he was doing, surprised that he, Lee Bentley, could even conceive of such a thing, he launched his attack with bared and glistening fangs straight at the throat of his enemy. His mouth closed. His fangs ripped home—and the great ape whose throat he had torn away, whose blood was salt on his slaver lips, was tossed aside as an empty husk, to die convulsively, a dripping horror which was humanlike in a ghastly fashion. Bentley felt like a murderer. Not like a murderer, either, but like a man who has slain unavoidably—and hates himself for doing so.

Ellen was backed against the tree into which Apeman had tried to force her.

Apeman was up now, moving to stand beside her. Apeman had discovered that he was not the invincible creature he had thought himself.

Bentley moved in closer to the two, as other apes charged upon him from both sides, smothering him, giving him no time. He was a stranger, seemingly, an upstart to be destroyed.

And he was forced to fight them with all his ape strength and human cunning, while Apeman, whimpering, caught up Ellen and darted away with her, straight into the jungle.

For Bentley this was a sort of respite. Ellen was not afraid to go with Apeman, thinking him Bentley. The great apes were bent on destroying this strange ape which had come into their midst and had already destroyed one of their number, perhaps their leader.

He must be destroyed.

Bentley fought like a man possessed. His arms were gory with crimson from the slashing fangs of his enemies. His mouth was dripping with red foam as he slashed in turn, with deadly accuracy. A great arm clutched at the hair of his chest—and fell away again, broken in two places, as Bentley snapped it like a pipe

stem because he knew leverages and was able to force his ape's body to obey the will of his human mind.

One ape whimpering, rolling away to lick at his wounds; whimpering oddly like a baby that has burned its fingers. A great ape weighing hundreds of pounds, crying like a child! Yet that "child," with his arm unbroken, could have taken a grown man, no matter how much of a giant, and torn him to pieces.

Two other apes were out of the fray, one dead, the other with only empty eye-sockets where his red-rimmed eyes had been.

Bentley guessed that Apeman had gone at least a mile into the jungle, heading directly away from the dwelling of Caleb Barter. He must get free and pursue. There was nothing else he could do. If he were slain, Ellen was doomed to a fate he dared not contemplate. Apeman would never be accepted by the apes because to all outward seeming he was a man. His body would never stand the hardship of the jungle, yet Apeman would never guess that, and

would be slain. Bentley must prevent that.

He must make sure that Apeman's body at least remained sufficiently healthy that it could become his own again without the necessity of a long sojourn in some hospital. Ellen must not be left alone with Apeman, who was still an ape, running away with a she.

A ghastly muddle.

Now the apes broke away from Bentley. They broke in all direction into the jungle. Some of them seemed on the trail of Apeman. One of them took to the trees, swinging himself along with the speed of a running man, flying from limb to limb with no support save his hands.

Bentley stared after the fleeing ape, and then gave chase. He felt that the ape was on the trail of Apeman. Bentley did not know that he himself could follow the spoor of Apeman, for he had not yet analyzed all of his new capabilities. But while he was discovering, he would follow something he could see

—the fleeing ape, who would overhaul Apeman as though Apeman were standing still.

So, in a manner of speaking, Bentley essayed his wings.

He took to the trees after the fleeing ape, and was amazed that his great arms worked with ease, that he swung from limb to limb as easily and as surely as the other apes. He climbed to the upper terrace, where view of the ground was entirely shut off. His eyes took note of limbs capable of bearing his weight—after he had made one mistake that might easily have proved costly. He had leaped to a limb that would have supported Bentley of the Bengal Queen, but that was a mere twig under the weight of Manape. It broke and he fell, clutching for support; and fate was kind to him in that he found it, and so clambered back and swung easily and swiftly along.

In his nostrils at intervals was a peculiar odor—a peculiarly human odor, reminding him of the work-sweat of a man who seldom bathed. He knew that for the odor of Apeman, and a thrill of exaltation

encompassed him as he realized that he was following a spoor by the cunning of his nostrils.

There was a great leap across space. The ape ahead of him made it with ease. Bentley essayed it without hesitation, hurling himself into space, all of a hundred feet above the ground; with all the might of his arms—and almost overshot the mark, almost went crashing once more through the branches. But the tree swayed, and held, and Bentley went swinging on.

It was wildly exhilarating, thrilling in a primitive way. Bentley remembered those dreams of his childhood—dreams of falling endlessly but never striking. Racial memories, scientists called them, relics of our simian forebears. Bentley thought of that and laughed; but his laughter was merely a beastly chattering which recalled him to the grim necessity of the moment.

Fifteen minutes passed, perhaps. Twenty. Half an hour. He was following a trace which led away from the coast, and further away from the cabin of Caleb Barter. But with his jungle senses, and his human memory, Bentley was sure he could return when the

time came.

Had Barter foreseen all that? Was Barter smiling to himself, back there in his awful hermitage, waiting for the working out of his "experiment"?

But Apeman had jungle knowledge, and must have forced Bentley's body to the limit of its endurance, for it was near evening when Bentley, who had lost the ape ahead of him, but had continued on the spoor of Apeman by the smell, came to swift pause on his race through the trees.

He had heard the voice of Ellen Estabrook, and the voice was pleading.

"Lee! Lee! If you love me try to regain control of yourself. Please do not stare at me like that. Oh, your poor body! The brush and briars have literally torn you to bits."

But the answer of "Lee" was a bestial snarl, and traveling as quietly as he could, Manape dropped down so that he could gaze upon his beloved, and the

thing she believed she loved.

Ellen was unaware of him. But he had scarcely dropped into view before Apeman became aware of him, and rose weakly to tottering limbs, to beat his bruised and bleeding chest in simian challenge.

Apeman was simply an ape that had run until he was finished, and now was turning to make a last stand against a male who was stronger—a last bid for life and possession of the she he had carried away.

Then Ellen saw Manape, screamed, and for the first time since she had been saved from the deep by Bentley, fainted dead away.

The two so strangely related creatures faced each other across her supine body—and both were savagely snarling. Apeman weakly but angrily, Manape with a sound of such brute savagery that even the twittering of birds died away to awed silence.

Chapter 8: Struggle for Mastery

It was Apeman who charged. Pity for Apeman welled up in Bentley. That was his own body which Apeman was so illy using. His own poor bruised and bleeding body, which Apeman had all but slain by forcing it far beyond human endurance. It must be saved, in spite of Apeman.

But there was something first to do. Bentley bent over Ellen, caught her under his arm, and returned to the trees, with Apeman chattering angrily and futilely behind him. Bentley found a crotch in the tree where he could place Ellen, made sure that she was safely propped there and that no snakes were near, and hurried back to the contest with Apeman which could not be avoided.

He did not fear the battle he knew he must fight. He hurried back because Apeman might realize himself beaten and escape into the jungle. In his weakened condition he could not travel far and would be easy prey for any prowling leopard, easy prey for the crawling things whose fangs held sure death. Or

would the cunning of Apeman, denizen of the jungle, warn him against any such? His ape brain would warn him, but would his human strength avail in case of necessity, in case of attack by another ape, or a four-footed carnivore?

Bentley hurried back because Apeman must be saved, somehow, even against his will. Apeman hated Manape with a deadly hatred. Yet to subdue the travesty of a human being, Manape must take care that he did not destroy his own casement of humanity. Any moment now and a great cat might charge from the shadows and destroy Apeman.

Apeman, snarling, beating his puny chest with his puny hands, was waiting for Manape his enemy.

Manape found himself thinking of the line: "'O wad some power the giftie gie us, to see oursilves as ithers see us,'" and adding some thoughts of his own.

"If that were actually 'I' down there, my chance of preserving the life of myself, and that of Ellen against the rigors of the jungle, would be absolutely nil. How

helpless we humans are in primitive surroundings! The tiniest serpent may slay us. The jungle cats destroy us with ease, if we be not equipped with artificial weapons which our better brains have created. As Manape, Barter's trained ape, I am better fitted to protect Ellen than if I were Bentley—the Bentley of the Bengal Queen. Yet she will cower away from me when she awakens."

Now Bentley was down, and Apeman was charging. He charged at a staggering run. He stepped on a thorn, hesitated, and whimpered. But he possessed unusual courage, for he still came on. Apeman knew the law of the jungle, that the weakest must die. Death was to be his portion if he could not withstand the assaults of Manape, and he came to meet his fate with high brute courage.

Apeman was close in. His hands were swinging, fists closed, in a strange travesty of a fighting man. Apeman was snarling. He groped for the throat of Manape with his human teeth—which sank home in the tough hide of Manape, hurting him as little as though Apeman were toothless.

"As Bentley I would have no chance at all against a great ape," said Bentley to himself.

Now could he take the pugnacity out of Apeman without destroying him? If he struck him he might strike too hard and slay Apeman—which was the equivalent of slaying himself. So Manape extended his mighty hands, caught Apeman under the armpits and held him up, feet swinging free. Yet Apeman still struggled, gnashed his teeth, and beat himself on the chest.

How utterly futile! As futile as Bentley in his own casement would have been against a great ape! Apeman might destroy himself through his very rage. How could Bentley render the travesty unconscious and yet make sure that Apeman did not die?

If he struck he might strike too hard and slay.

What should he do?

A low coughing sound came from somewhere close by. From the depths of his consciousness Bentley knew

that sound. He clutched Apeman in his right arm, swung back to the tree and up among the branches. He was just in time. The tawny form of a great cat passed beneath, missing him by inches.

But while he had saved himself and Apeman, he had been clumsy. He had struck the head of Apeman against the bole of the tree, and Apeman hung limp in his arm. Bentley, fear such as he had never before known gripping him, pressed his huge ear to Apeman's heart. It was beating steadily and strongly. With a great inner sigh of relief he climbed to safety in the tree, bearing Apeman with him.

He reached the crotch where Ellen rested, and disposed Apeman nearby, his own gross body between them. He even dared to gather Ellen closer against him for warmth. His left hand held tightly the wrist of the unconscious Apeman, so that he should not fall and become prey of the night denizens of the jungle.

So, the two who seemed to be human—Apeman and Ellen, passed from unconsciousness into natural sleep, while Bentley-Manape remained motionless

between them, afraid to close his eyes lest something even more terrible than hitherto experienced might transpire. But his ears caught every sound of the jungle, and his sensitive ape's nostrils brought him every scent—which his man's mind strove to analyze, reaching back and back into the dim and misty past for identification of odors that were new, or that were really old, yet which had been lost to man since they had left forever the simian homes of their ancestors and their senses had become more highly specialized.

The questions which turned over and over in Bentley's mind were these:

How shall I tell Ellen the truth? Will she believe it?

What is the rest of Barter's experiment? How shall I proceed from this moment on? How shall I procure food for Ellen? What food will Apeman choose for my body to assimilate?

And jungle night drew on. Once Ellen shivered and pressed closer to Manape as she slept.

What would morning bring to this strange trio?

Chapter 9: Fate Decides

Morning brought the great apes of the jungle—scores of them. They had approached so silently through the darkness that Bentley had not heard them, and his ape's nostrils had not told his human brain the meaning of their odor. It appeared too that his ape's ears had tricked him. For when morning came there were great apes everywhere.

Bentley still held the wrist of Apeman, whose chest was rising and falling naturally, though the body was limp and plainly exhausted, and exuded perspiration that told of some jungle fever or other illness perhaps, induced by hardship and over-exertion. The ape's brain of Apeman had driven Bentley's body to the uttermost, and now that body must pay.

Bentley wondered how far he was now from the cabin of Caleb Barter.

He doubted if Apeman could stand the return journey, though Bentley's ape body could have carried Apeman's with ease. But would Apeman stand the

journey? Apeman, Bentley knew, was going into the Valley of the Shadow, and something must be done to save him. But what?

And the great apes constituted a new menace, though they were making no effort to molest the three in the tree. Apeman must be placed in a shady place and some attention paid to his needs. But the human body with the ape's brain could not tell how it hurt or where.

The first task was to get the two beings down from the tree, and much depended upon chance. To the apes Bentley was another ape, one moreover which had slain a number of them. But Apeman was a human being, as was Ellen Estabrook. The whole thing constituted a fine problem for the brain of Manape.

If Manape were to attempt first aid for Apeman, how would such a sight react upon Ellen Estabrook? If Manape were to attempt to take Apeman back to Caleb Barter, leading the way for Ellen, would she follow, and what would his action tell her? She would

think herself demented, imagining things, because a great ape did things which only human beings were supposedly capable of doing.

If she knew, of course, it would make a difference. But she did not, and Bentley had no means by which to inform her. That was a problem for the future. Ellen was sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion and he felt that he could safely leave her for the moment while he swung Apeman down from the tree. He must work fast, and return for Ellen before the great apes discovered the helpless Apeman at the foot of the tree. He hoped to get Ellen down while she slept, knowing that she would be in mortal fear of him if she wakened and found herself in his power.

Bentley got Apeman down, and looked about him. No apes were close enough, as far as he could tell, to molest Apeman before Bentley could return with Ellen. He raced back into the tree, lifted Ellen so gently that she scarcely altered the even motion of her breathing—and for a moment he hesitated. So close to him were her tired lips. So woe-begone and pathetic her appearance, a great well of pity for her

rose in the heart of Bentley—or what was the seat of this emotion within him? Was the brain the seat of the emotions? Or the heart? But Bentley's true heart was in Apeman's human body, so there must be some other explanation for the feeling which grew and grew within Bentley for Ellen.

He leaned forward with the intention of touching his lips to the tired thin lips of Ellen Estabrook, then drew back in horror.

How could he kiss this woman whom he loved with the gross lips of Manape, the great ape?

He could, of course, but suppose she wakened at his caress and saw the great figure of the jungle brute, with all man's emotions and desires, yet with none of man's restraint—bending over her? Women had gone insane over less.

He hurried down with Ellen, and placed her beside Apeman.

By now the great apes had discovered the strange trio

and were coming close to investigate. There was a huge brute who came the fastest and seemed to be the leader of the apes, if any they had. But even this one did not offer a challenge, did not seem perturbed in the least. But he did seem filled with childish curiosity. The apes themselves were like children, children grown to monstrous proportions, advancing and retreating, staring at this trio, darting away when Apeman or Ellen made some sort of movement.

Bentley could sense too their curiosity where he was concerned. Their senses told them that Bentley was a great ape. Their instincts, however, made them hesitate, uncertain as to his true "identity"—or so Bentley imagined.

Ellen still slept, but she must have sensed the near presence of potential enemies, for she was stirring fitfully, preparing to waken.

What would her reaction be when she opened her eyes to see Manape near her, standing guard over Apeman, with the jungle on all sides filled with the lurking nightmare figures of other great apes?

A moan of anguish came from Apeman. He stirred, and groans which seemed to rack his whole white bruised body came forth. The brain of the ape was reacting to the suffering of Bentley's body—and a brute was whimpering with its hurts. The advancing apes came to pause. They seemed to stare at one another in amazement. They were suddenly frightened, amazed, unable to understand the thing they saw and were listening to. Bentley crouched there, watching the apes, and he fancied he could understand their sudden new hesitancy.

He did not know, but he guessed that the moans and groans of Apeman were comprehensible to the great apes. They knew that this strangely white creature was an ape, though he looked like a man. Already they had wondered as much as they were capable, about Manape. They had sensed something not simian about him which puzzled them.

But from the lips of Apeman, to add to their mystification, came the groans and moans of an ape that was suffering. Bentley held his position, wondering what they would do. That they meant no

harm he was sure, else they would long since have charged and overborne the three—unless they remembered the super-simian might of Manape and were afraid to attack again. Bentley hoped so, for that would make things easier for them all.

Now the nearest apes were almost beside the body of Apeman, which was still covered with agony sweat. The lips emitted moans and faint blurs of gibberish. Bentley noted that the leading ape was a great she. The female came forward hesitantly, making strange sounds in her throat, and it seemed to Bentley that Apeman answered them. For the she came forward with the barest trace of hesitancy, stared for a moment at Manape, with a sort of challenge in her savage little red eyes, then dropped to all fours beside Apeman and began to lick his wounds!

The she knew something of the injuries of Apeman and was doing what instinct told her to do for him. Now the rest of the apes were all about them—and Ellen wakened with a shrill cry of terror.

Bentley remained as a man turned to stone. If he

moved toward the woman he loved she would flee from him in terror—out among the other apes and into the jungle where she would have no slightest chance for life. If he did nothing she might still run.

Wildly she looked about her. She screamed again when she saw the she bending over the travesty she thought to be Bentley, and licking the poor bruised body. Ellen cast a sidelong look at Manape, and there was something distinctly placating in her eyes. She recognized Manape, and wanted his friendship. What thoughts crowded her brain as she realized that she was in the center of a group of anthropoids who could have destroyed her with their fingers in a matter of seconds!

She did the one thing which proved to Bentley that she was worthy of any man's love. The great she who licked the wounds of Apeman was thrice the size of Ellen. Yet Ellen crawled to Apeman, little sounds of pity in her throat. Instantly the snarling of the she sent her back. The she had, for the time being at least, assumed proprietorship of Apeman, and was bidding Ellen keep her distance. And the she meant it,

too. For she bared her fighting fangs when Ellen again approached close enough to have touched the body of Apeman.

This time she advanced a step toward the girl, and her snarl was a terrible sound. Ellen retreated, but no further than was necessary to still that snarl in the throat of the she. Manape moved in quite close now, into position to interfere if she tried to actually injure Ellen Estabrook. If only, Bentley thought, there were some way of making himself known to Ellen! But how could she believe, even if a way were discovered?

"What shall I do?" moaned Ellen aloud, wringing her hands. "Poor Lee! I can't move him. That brute won't let me touch him. Oh, I'm afraid!"

Bentley wanted to tell her not to be afraid, but had learned from experience that when he tried to speak his voice was the bellowing one of a great ape. And if he were to enunciate words that Ellen could understand, what then? English from the lips of a giant anthropoid! She would not believe, would think

herself insane—and with excellent reason. Slowly, as matters were transpiring, she had already been given sufficient reason to believe that her mind was tottering.

Manape stood guard over her. As she had adopted the thing she thought was Bentley. A score of great apes, which only three days ago had tried to destroy both Bentley and herself, now surrounded Bentley and Ellen with all the appearance of amity—crude, true, but unmistakable. Certainly this was sufficiently beyond all human experience to make Ellen believe she were in the throes of some awful nightmare. What would she think if an ape began to address her in English, and "Bentley" suddenly held speech with the great apes?

Add to this possibility, suppose she were suddenly confronted with the truth—that the essential entities of Bentley and Manape had been exchanged, and the whole thing were explained to her from the gross lips of Manape himself, while "Bentley" looked on and chattered a challenge in ape language while Manape talked?

No, at first she might have understood. Now it would have been even more horrifying for her to hear the truth. She must think what she would, and be allowed to adjust herself to the astounding state of affairs. Apeman could not be moved for some time. Ellen would not leave him, naturally. Nor would Manape. And the apes apparently intended to remain with them. Which made the problem, after all, a simple one. The trio must remain for the time being among the great apes. They needed one another in a strange way, and they needed the apes themselves, which were like a formidable army at their backs, as protection against the other beasts of the wilds.

Bentley watched the great she continue her rude first aid for Apeman. Apeman was still moaning, though less fitfully, like a child that nuzzles the milk bottle, but is drifting away into sleep. The she gave the travesty her full attention. There was something horribly human about her maternal care of this creature before her. Her great arms held Apeman close while her tongue caressed his wounds. Bentley knew that that tongue was an excellent antiseptic,

too. All animals licked their own wounds, and those wounds healed. Only human beings knew the dangers of infection, because they had departed from Nature's doctrines and had tried to cheat her with substitutes. Only the animals, like that great she, still were Nature's children, healing their own wounds in Nature's way.

Satisfied that the apes would not molest Ellen, so long as she kept her distance from Apeman, Bentley decided to seek food, which Ellen must sorely need. The need for water was urgent, too. Bentley knew the danger of drinking water found in the jungle—but an ape could scarcely be expected to build a fire with which to boil the water, nor to produce a miracle in the shape of something to hold it in over the fire.

Here were many makeshifts indicated, then. Bentley smiled inwardly, the only way he could smile. He must feed himself, too. He must go wandering through the woods, feeding the body of Manape with grubs, worms and such nauseous provender, because it was the food to which Manape was accustomed. Apeman, when he was well enough to eat, would sicken the

body of Bentley with the same sort of food, because the brain of Apeman would not know what was good or bad for the body of a human being—nor even would understand that his body was human. What did Apeman think of his condition, anyway?

That question, of course, would never be answered—unless Barter could really speak the language of the great apes and somehow managed to secure from Apeman, if Apeman lived, a recital of these hours in the jungle.

What food should Manape secure for Ellen? What fruits were edible, what poisonous? How could he tell? He watched the other apes, which were scattering here and there now, tipping over rocks and sticks to search for grubs and worms—to see what fruits they ate, if any. They would know what fruits to avoid.

An hour passed before Bentley saw one of the brutes feed upon anything except insects. A cluster of a peculiar fruit which looked like wild currants, but whose real name Bentley did not know. Now, feeling

safe in his choice, because the ape was eating the berries with relish, Bentley searched until he found a quantity of the same berries, and bore them back to Ellen Estabrook.

Beside Apeman, who now was awake and exchanging crazy gibberish with the she who had licked his wounds, Ellen Estabrook, trying to be brave, did not cry aloud. But her face was dirty, and her tears made furrows through the grime.

Manape dropped the berries beside her. The she snarled as Ellen reached for the berries. Manape flung himself forward as the she strove to take the berries before Ellen could grasp them—and cuffed her over backward with a cumbersome but lightning-fast right swing.

"Manape," said Ellen, "if only you could talk! I feel that you are my friend, and my fears are less when you are with me. I'll pretend that you can understand me. It helps a little to talk, for one scarcely seems so much alone. How would you feel, I wonder, Manape, if you were suddenly taken entirely out of the life you've

always known, and forced to live in another world entirely? It would not be easy to be brave, would it? Suppose you were taken out of the wilds and dropped into a ballroom?"

Bentley could have laughed had the jest not been such a grim one. What would Ellen think if he were to answer her:

"I would be much more at home in that ballroom than that thing on the ground that you love—as matters are at this moment!"

She would not understand that.

Nor did she understand when she went away for a time and came back with a supply of worms and grubs—which nauseous supply vanished with great speed under the wolfish appetite of Apeman. There was little wonder that Ellen found it difficult to orient herself.

"I must tell her somehow," thought Bentley, "and that soon. Surely enough has been done to satisfy the

devilish curiosity of Caleb Barter."

Toward evening the apes began to drift further into the jungle. The she gathered Apeman in her arms and moved off with him. There was nothing for Manape to do but follow, and nothing for Ellen to do but follow, too—if she loved the thing she thought was Bentley. She did not hesitate.

With unfaltering courage she followed on, and the lumbering forms of the great apes drifted further away from the sea, seemingly headed toward some mutely agreed upon jungle rendezvous. Everything depended for the time upon the return to health of Apeman. All other matters depended upon that. Each in his own way, Manape and Ellen, realized this. Caleb Barter had schemed better than he could possibly have foreseen.

Chapter 10:Written in Dust

As Apeman was borne deeper into the jungle in the great arms of the she, what was more natural in the circumstances than that Ellen keep close to her only remaining link with the world she had left—Manape, the trained anthropoid of Caleb Barter? A natural thing, and one that filled Manape with obvious pleasure.

Once she touched his hand, rested her own small one in his mighty palm for a moment—and Bentley was afraid to return the pressure of her palm with the hand of Manape, lest he crush every bone in her fingers. Thereafter at intervals, while the whole aggregation drifted deeper into the jungle, Ellen clung to Manape; depended upon him. Was it her woman's intuition which told her that Manape was a safe guardian?

Bentley refused to dwell on that phase of this wild adventure however, for there were other things to think about. It required many hours for him to discover the truth, but he knew it at last. He, Manape-

Bentley, was the lord of the great apes! Before his capture, or before the capture of Manape by Caleb Barter, Manape had been leader of these apes. Now he had returned and was their ruler once more. Upstarts had taken his place, and he had slain them—back there when Apeman had tried to escape into the jungle with Ellen in his arms. To the apes this must have seemed the way it was.

Bentley was putting things together, hoping and believing that they made four—yet not sure but that he was forcing them to equal four when in actuality they were five or six. If Manape—the original ape of Barter's capture, whose body now was Bentley's—had been the leader of the great apes, that explained why the animals remained constantly in the vicinity of Barter's dwelling. Barter had needed them in his plans, and had made certain their remaining near by making their leader captive. And of course only an ape sufficiently intelligent to rule other apes would have suited the evil scheme which must have been growing for years in the mind of Caleb Barter. Barter had merely waited with philosophic calmness for

human beings to drift into this territory—and the Bengal Queen had obligingly gone down off the coast, throwing Ellen Estabrook and Lee Bentley into Barter's power.

What was Barter doing now? Would he not be striving to watch the course of his experiment? Would he not think of details hitherto overlooked and plan further experiments, or an enlarging of this experiment of which three creatures were the victims? Surely Barter would not remain quietly at Barterville while the subjects of his experiment went deeper into the jungle with the great apes. Barter was too thorough a scientist for that. Somehow, Bentley was sure, Barter would know what was happening, even at this very moment.

He would wish to know how a modern woman would conduct herself if suddenly forced to live among apes. Therefore he would try in some manner to keep watch over the conduct of Ellen Estabrook. He would wonder how a modern man would conduct himself if he suddenly found, himself the leader of that same group of apes, and how an ape would behave if he

suddenly discovered himself a man. It was a neat "experiment," and Bentley was beginning to believe that there was probably far more to it than there first had seemed.

Barter would wish to know how all three creatures would conduct themselves in certain circumstances—Apeman, Ellen and Bentley. He would not leave it to chance, for Bentley now realized that Barter himself did not feel inimical to either Ellen, Apeman or Bentley. To him they were merely an experiment. Barter would not wish for Apeman to die, and thus deprive Barter of a certain knowledge relative to one angle of his unholy experiment. He would not wish for Manape-Bentley to remain forever as Manape-Bentley, lacking the power of speech, either human speech or the gibberish of the apes.

No, all this was not being left to chance. Bentley believed that Barter was directing the destination of these three subjects of his, as surely as though he were right with them at this moment, driving them to his will with that awful lash which had made him feared by the great apes.

Yes, Barter was still the master mind. It made Bentley feel awfully helpless. Yet—he was the leader of the great apes. That, too, Barter must have foreseen. Would Barter try in any way to discover how Bentley would behave in an emergency as leader of the apes? Would he wish to know sufficiently to create an emergency? From Bentley's knowledge of the twisted genius of Caleb Barter, he fully believed that Barter planned yet other angles to his experiment.

If he did, then what would he do next?

It was not until the storm broke over the strange aggregation of great apes, who seemed to be holding two white people prisoners, that Bentley understood that from the very beginning he should have been able to see the obvious denouement—the mad climax which even then was preparing in the jungle ahead, simply waiting for the great apes to drift, feeding as they went without a thought of danger, into the trap set for them.

Ellen now kept her hand in the great palm of Manape. She wept on occasions, when she thought of the

apparent hopelessness of her position, but for the most part she was brave, and Bentley grew to love her more as the hours passed—even as he grew more impatient at his inability to express his love. If he tried he could simply frighten her—fill her with horror because, gentle though he was with her and he was a great ape, a fact which nothing could change. Nor could anybody change the fact, except Caleb Barter. Where was the scientist? What would be his next move if he were not leaving the working out of his experiment entirely to chance, which seemed not at all in keeping with the thorough manner of his experiment thus far.

The future was a dark, painful obscurity, in which all things were hidden, in which anything might happen—because Caleb Barter would wish for it to happen.

How long would Barter wait before making his next move? Long enough for Ellen to accustom herself to life among the apes? Long enough to discover whether her natural intelligence would guide her to eke out existence among hardships such as human beings never thought of, except perhaps in

nightmares? Long enough to allow the brain of Bentley to discover what miracles intellect might do with the body of Manape? Long enough for Apeman to be well of his illness, so that he might observe what havoc an ape's brain might work with a human body?

Certainly when one gave the hideous experiment full thought, its possible angles of development, its many potential ramifications, were astounding in the extreme. Was it not up to Bentley then to do something besides mope and pine for the impossible, and thus hasten the hour when Barter should be wholly satisfied with his experiment?

What would Apeman do, how would he behave, when the white body of Bentley was well again? Would that body grow well faster when guided by an ape's brain than when a human brain was in command? Certainly Caleb Barter must have listed all these questions and hundreds of others which had not as yet occurred to Bentley. If he had he would not transfer the two intelligences back to their proper places until all of his questions were answered to his satisfaction. Bentley himself must somehow force an answer to

some of them.

To do this he must try to guess what sort of questions Barter would have listed, and try to work out their answers—assuming all the time that Barter, from some undiscovered coign of vantage would be watching for the answers he hoped his experiment would provide.

Bentley arrived at a decision. Ellen must long since have become numbed to the horror which encompassed her. Bentley knew that a human brain could stand only so much, beyond which it was no longer surprised or horrified. He guessed, noting the pale face of his beloved, that Ellen had well nigh reached that stage.

He decided to take a tremendous risk with her sanity, hoping thereby to do his part in working out the details of Barter's experiment.

The sun was creeping into the west when the roving apes came to pause in a sort of clearing. Some of them curled up in sleep. The she who carried Apeman

squatted with Apeman in her arms, and licked his wounds again.

That Apeman was recovering was plainly evident, and when he saw it filled Bentley with an odd mixture of thankfulness and revulsion. Apeman was essentially an ape. With all his strength back he would revert to type, and what if he forced the body of Bentley to do horrible things that Ellen would never be able to forget or condone—even when she at last knew the truth? What if Apeman selected, for example, a mate—from among the hairy she's? For Apeman that would be natural, for Bentley horrible.

Yet it might easily transpire. Apeman might relinquish the white she to a successful rival—which he would regard Manape as being—and content himself with a choice from the ape she's. Somehow that unholy thing must not happen. That was up to Manape-Bentley.

Or, with his strength fully returned, Apeman might again desire Ellen, and force the issue with Manape for her possession—which seemed equally horrible to the brain of Bentley.

Ellen remained as close to Apeman as she would permit her. Manape-Bentley crouched close by. After a time Apeman slept, and Bentley was pleased to notice that the agony sweat no longer beaded Apeman's body, and that Apeman was recovering with superhuman swiftness—thanks to the ministrations of the unnamed she who had taken charge of him. Apeman now rarely groaned, sleeping or waking.

Ellen watched the sleeping Apeman with her heart—and her fears—in her eyes. Satisfied that he slept, and that his sleep was healthy, Ellen again approached the creature she knew as Manape, Barter's trained ape.

"If only you could talk," she said to him. "If only you were able to give some hope. If only there were some way I could cause you to understand my wishes—understand and help me."

Bentley did not answer. He knew that to be useless. But his brain remembered something. His brain recalled that moment in the cage in the dwelling of Barter, when his human brain had tried to force obedience from the great clumsy hands of Manape,

when he had tried to force those mighty fingers to unfasten the knots which held the cage door secure.

Could he force those hands to something else?

Did he dare try?

It was a terrible risk to take with Ellen's sanity, but Bentley felt it must be taken. She was watching him hopelessly, and her lips moved as though she prayed for a miracle—as though by some weird necromancy she might force Manape to understand her words, and to answer her, allaying her fears, destroying her hopelessness.

When Ellen watched him, Bentley searched about nearby until he found a dried stick perhaps eight feet in length. He held it up, sniffed at it, fumbled it with his heavy, grotesque fingers. He focussed the attention of Ellen upon that stick, while his excitement mounted and mounted, and his fear of possible consequences kept pace with his excitement.

Then, his decision reached, he began again that

species of hypnosis which seemed necessary to compel the hands and fingers of Manape to do things no ape's hands had ever done before, no ape's brain had ever thought of doing.

He pressed one end of the stick against the ground at his sprawling feet. With his left palm he smoothed out an area of dust several feet in either direction—a rough dusty rectangle.

Interested, her brows puckered in concentration. Ellen watched as Manape went through these gestures which were so strangely, terribly human.

Her eyes were watching the end of that twig which the trained ape was so clumsily clutching in both hands.

She saw the marks the twig made in the dust as Manape caused it to move—slowly, horribly, fearfully, from left to right across the area of dust.

Fear began to grow in her face, but Bentley forced himself on. Again the fetid odor of ape sweat covered

him. This awful concentration, this awful task of forcing Manape to write English words was in itself a miracle, more miraculous even than Ellen would have thought of praying for.

Her eyes were glued to the sprawling, uneven, misshapen marks in the dust with hypnotic fascination. Bentley dared not look at her, because it required all his will to force the clumsy hands of Manape to his bidding.

He could only watch the marks in the dust, and will with all the power of his human intelligence that the hands of Manape make their shape sufficiently plain that Ellen might read them—and hope besides that this terrible thing would not send the sorely harassed girl into the jungle, madly shrieking for deliverance from a nightmare.

There, the words were written—and Ellen was staring at them, her eyes wide and unblinking, her body as rigid as stone, and her face as cold. Only three words were possible without an interval of rest, but those three words, among all Bentley might have selected,

were the most to the point, the most unbelievable, the most black-magical.

"I am Lee!"



Minutes went into eternity as Ellen stared at the words. Silence that it seemed would never be broken hang over the clearing. The bickering of the apes passed unnoticed as Ellen stared. Then, slowly, she tried to raise her eyes to meet those of Manape.

She failed. Her body went limp and she slid forward

on her face in the dust. Manape-Bentley gently turned her on her side and waited. What would he see in her beloved eyes when she regained consciousness?

Chapter 11: Barter Acts

Bentley remained motionless, awaiting Ellen's return to consciousness. He waited in fear and trembling. How would she react to the horrible thing he had told her?

Now there was possibility of converse between them. If she knew and realized the meaning of his revelation. But would her mind stand up under the awfulness of it? He had thought so, else he would not have taken the chance he had taken. Much now depended upon Ellen, and all he could do was wait.

Slowly she began to move. Moans escaped her lips, little pathetic moans, and the name of Lee Bentley.

At last her eyes opened, and widened with horror when they met those of Manape. Bentley knew that there were tears on the face of Bentley-Manape. Manape, it seemed, cried easily, like a child.

Her eyes still wide with horror. Ellen Estabrook slowly turned them until she gazed at the dust rectangle in

which presumably a great ape had written words in English. But Bentley-Manape had rubbed out the words. She turned and looked at Manape again, and her lips writhed and twisted. She was seeking for words, shaping words, to ask questions such as none in all the world's history had ever asked of a giant anthropoid, with any hope of receiving answers.

"You tell me you are Lee," she began slowly, hesitantly, as though the words were literally forced from her against her will. "I cannot grasp the meaning of that. You say you are Lee, yet I recognize you as Manape, Caleb Barter's great ape. Yet Manape could not have written those words. Yet, if you are Lee Bentley, who or what is that?"

She turned and pointed a trembling finger at Apeman. Bentley of course could not answer her in words, yet his mind was busy conceiving of some way in which he might answer her. She turned back to him after a long look at Apeman and studied him. His huge barrel chest, the mighty arms, the receding forehead—the outward seeming of a giant ape.

Again that hesitant, horribly difficult task, of forcing the arms of Manape to perform actions which were not natural to the arms of a great ape. Bentley managed to raise the right arm in the gesture of pointing.

He pointed at the other apes, some of which slept, some of which ate of grubs and worms, or bickered savagely among themselves over whatever childish trifles seemed important to the ape mind.

"You mean," said Ellen huskily, "that Lee Bentley there is really an ape?"

Manape nodded, ponderously.

Ellen's face became animated. She was beginning to understand how to hold speech with Manape.

"You tell me he is a great ape, yet he has the body of Lee Bentley. You tell me you are Bentley, yet I see you as Manape. Caleb Barter's trained ape. How am I to understand? Are my eyes betraying me, or is this a nightmare from which I shall waken presently? I see

the shape of Manape, who writes in the dust that he is Lee. How can I know? None of you I can see is Lee Bentley. What part of you that I cannot see is Lee?"

Again the effort of forcing the hands of Manape to obedience.

Manape-Bentley tapped his receding forehead with his knuckles, and a gasp burst from the lips of Ellen Estabrook.

"You mean your brain is Bentley's brain, and that Bentley's body holds the brain of a great ape?"

Manape nodded clumsily.

"But how? You mean—Caleb Barter? I remember about him now. A master surgeon, an expert on anesthesia—a thousand years ahead of his time. You mean then that we three are part of an experiment? You, Manape, have the brain of Bentley, and Bentley has the brain of a great ape?"

Bentley nodded.

The face of Ellen Estabrook writhed and twisted. Her eyes studied the person of Manape the great ape. She could not believe the thing she had been told, yet she was thinking back and back—back to when Apeman had carried her away, his subsequent behavior, his behavior in the house of Barter, and his interest in the she ape who had licked his wounds.

She remembered how Manape in the beginning had looked at her with the eyes of a lustful man—and how later all his attitude had been protective. There seemed evidence in plenty to support the statement Manape had mutely managed to give her. She was forced to believe.

"But, Lee,"—she came closer to Manape as she spoke—"we must do something for that creature there—that thing with the ape she which looks like the man I love. You've heard me say that I love Lee Bentley?"

Manape nodded.

"Does Lee Bentley love me?"

Again Manape nodded, more vehemently this time. Ellen smiled. Then, quickly, she came to Manape, thrust her fingers against his skull and examined it closely. Her brows were furrowed in concentration. She left Manape and strode to Apeman. The she growled at her but she ignored the beast as much as possible, though plainly cognizant of the fact that she dared not touch her hands to Apeman on pain of being torn asunder by the fighting fangs of the ape she.

hen Ellen came back.

"The evidence is there, Lee," she said. "There are the marks of a surgeon's instruments. Marvelous. One is almost inclined to forget the horror of it in the realization that a miracle has been performed. The operation was perfect. But what did he use for anesthesia? How did Barter manage to complete his operation and cause his two patients to feel no-ill

effects, to be to all intents and purposes well in mind and body—all within less than twelve hours?

However, that does not matter now. Something must be done. Since Caleb Barter was the only man who could perform this unholy operation, he is the only one who could repeat it restoring each of you to your proper earthly casements. So we must play in with him. I suppose you've long since decided that way, Lee?"

How strange it seemed to Ellen to discuss such matters with Manape. But behind his brutish exterior was the brain of the man whom she loved.

"And there is one other thing," Ellen almost whispered, and her face flushed rosily. "No harm must come to the body of Lee, you understand? He must never be permitted to do anything of which Lee Bentley of after years may have cause to feel ashamed."

Manape nodded. He understood her, and despite the grotesquerie of the whole thing there was something intimate and sweet about this interchange. A man and

woman loved. Just now that love was mentioned more or less in the abstract, discussed on purely a mental basis—but both Bentley and Ellen Estabrook were thinking of the future, and were as frank with each other as they perhaps ever would be again.

Now the apes were beginning to stir themselves. It was time to be on the move again. Eyes were turned toward Manape, who was plainly intended to lead them further into the jungle. Ellen and the white body of Bentley were already being accepted as a matter of course.

If the great apes wondered why their returned lord did not jabber with them in the gibberish of the great apes, there was no way of telling, for there was no way in which Manape could make himself understood, nor any way the great apes could tell their thoughts to Manape.

Then, without warning, the blow fell.

The storm broke, and even as the uproar started Bentley was sure that he could sense behind it the

fine hand of Caleb Barter—still working out his "experiment," with human beings and apes as the pawns.

The apes were on the move, entering a series of aisles through the gloomy woods when the blow fell—in the shape of scores of nets, in whose folds within a matter of seconds the great apes were fighting and snarling helplessly. They expended their mighty strength to no avail. They fought at ropes and thongs which they did not understand—and only Manape made no effort to fight, knowing it useless.

Scores of black folk armed with spears danced and yelled in the brush, frankly delighted at the success of their grand coup. Barter was nowhere to be seen, and there was a possibility that he knew nothing about this. Yet Bentley knew better. Perhaps, in order to stimulate the blacks, he had offered them money for great apes taken alive. Anyhow, scores of the apes were taken, and now exhausted themselves in savage bellowing and snarling, as they fought for freedom.

A half dozen to each net, the blacks gathered in their

captives. They made much over Ellen Estabrook. They pawed over Apeman despite his snarls and bellowings, and laughed when Apeman played the ape as though to the manner born. They scented some mystery here, a white man raised by the apes, perhaps. But that Ellen and Apeman were prisoners of blacks, Bentley could plainly understand. He scarcely knew which was the more horrible for her—to be prisoner of the apes or the blacks.

But for the moment there was nothing he could do. And the blacks were not torturing either Apeman or Ellen, though there was no mistaking what he saw in the faces of the blacks when they looked at Ellen and grinned at one another.

Darkness had fallen over the world when the blacks went shouting into a village of mud-wattled huts, bearing the trophies of their ape hunt. Still in their nets for safety's sake, the great apes were thrown into a sort of stockade which had plainly just been built for their reception—proof to Bentley that this decision to make an attack against the passing band of anthropoids had been a sudden one. What did that

indicate?

Someone had caused the blacks to react in a way that never would have occurred to them ordinarily.

Caleb Barter?

Bentley thought so. What now was Bentley supposed to do? What did Barter expect him to do? What did Barter expect Ellen to do? What did he expect Apeman to do?

There was no question, as Bentley saw it, but that Caleb Barter still pulled the strings, and that before morning this jungle village was to witness a horror it should never forget.

But at the moment Bentley had but one thought: to escape quietly with Ellen and Apeman, and return to the dwelling of Caleb Barter.

Chapter 12: Jungle Justice

Again that grim concentration on the part of Bentley, forcing the unaccustomed great hands of Manape to perform things they had never done before. He must release himself from the rope net which held him. For the hands of a human being the task would have been easy. For the hands of Manape, even though guided by the will of Bentley, the task was far from easy.

But he persevered.

An hour after the apes had been dumped in the stockade, Bentley had released himself from the rope net and was resting after the awful ordeal of forcing the hands of Manape to do his bidding. He pressed himself against the uprights of the stockade, and carefully tested them with his strength. The strength of Bentley would never have availed against the stout uprights of the stockade. Yet Manape-Bentley knew that with the arms of Manape he could tear the uprights out of the ground as easily as though they had been match-sticks. What should he do now?

His first impulse of course was to release the rest of the great apes. The brutes still fought at their bindings and were utterly insane with rage. What would they do when they were released? What was his duty where they were concerned? If they went wild through the native village, slaying and laying waste, would Bentley be responsible for loss of life? If he left the apes in the hands of the natives, what then? He would never afterward forgive himself. He knew them as children of the wilds, carefree and happy brutes of the jungle. Now if held captives indefinitely they would either die or spend the rest of their lives in cages.

No, he would release the animals, one by one. The natives would have to take their chances.

A white figure loomed out of the darkness, coming from the direction of a great bonfire which showed all the jungle surrounding in weird, crimson relief. The white figure, all but nude, was Apeman! Following him were several natives, who laughed and prodded Apeman with the butts of their spears.

Bentley understood that. They thought Apeman a demented white man, and to these natives a demented one was a butt of jokes. They did not even suspect the horror of the possible revenge that was growing in the brain of the ape which controlled the body of Apeman.

Twice or thrice Apeman tried to dart into the jungle, but always the blacks prevented, heading him toward the cage where the apes were held prisoners. Bentley wondered where Ellen was and what was happening to her.

A celebration of some sort seemed going forward in the village. Was Caleb Barter somewhere near, perhaps on the edge of the jungle, grinning gleefully at this thing he had brought about as part of his unholy experiment? There was no way of knowing of course, yet.

But....

Apeman reached the side of the stockade and snarled back at his annoyers, while his white hands grasped

the uprights and tore at them with futile savagery. A strange situation. Inside the stockade a score of brutes who could rip the stockade to bits. Outside, one of them free, but hampered by the puny strength of a human being.

The blacks shouted to Apeman but of course Bentley could not understand what they said. Apeman turned after snarling at them for a few moments, and began to chatter in that gibberish which appeared to be Apeman's only mode of speech—ape language on the lips of a man! This was the only time it had ever happened.

The apes stirred fitfully as Apeman chattered, and began to renew their attacks on their bonds. The blacks, after watching Apeman for a few moments turned back toward the bonfire, evidently satisfied that this strange demented creature would not run away. Apeman chattered and the apes made answer.

The she who had nursed Apeman managed to reach the side of the stockade, and for several moments Bentley listened to the horrible grotesqueries—an ape

she and a man talking together in brutish gibberish, and with hellish intimacy.

Now, wondering just how matters would work themselves out, Bentley set himself the task of releasing the apes. They would at least create a furor in the village, during which Bentley could escape into the jungle with Apeman and Ellen Estabrook before the natives could reorganise themselves and give chase.

His plan was hazy, and he figured without the savagery of Apeman who occupied that white body which had been Bentley's. His one thought was to free the apes, set them upon the village, and escape with Apeman and Ellen. Just that and no more; but he did not know the great apes, nor how thoroughly they followed the lead of their lord whom they knew as Manape, though how he was named in their brains he was never to know.

One by one he released the apes. They seemed to sense the necessity for stealth, for they began to ape the cautious behavior of Manape. Apeman, outside,

seemed to be advising them, telling them what to do.

One by one as Manape released them, the apes squatted side by side, their red angry little eyes watching his every move. Bentley knew of course what a fearful racket his own appearance would cause when he strode out of the gloom among the blacks, seeking Ellen. But he knew that surprise for a few precious moments would render the blacks incapable of stopping him until he got away. At least he hoped so.

Beyond that he had no other plan. All depended upon the behavior of the apes and the reaction of the blacks who were holding a devil's dance about the mighty fire in the center of their village. Bentley did not even yet dare guess what the apes would do when they saw what Manape-Bentley did. Would they follow him? Or would they race for the jungle to escape?

A few minutes now would tell the tale. He had released the last of the great apes, who now lined the side of the stockade, apparently holding angry converse with Apeman. Bentley was reminded of the

old fashioned mob of pioneer days—angrily muttering yet lacking a leader to direct their efforts. Well, he had done his duty as he saw it. From now on things must take their course.

But Bentley waited, watching the dancing figures about the fire. As far as he could tell the dance was approaching some sort of a climax. The figures leaped higher as they danced, and the noise of their shouting raced and rolled across the jungle. They appeared to be drunk with some sort of excitement, perhaps helped by native liquor, perhaps because of superstitious frenzy.

If he waited for their excitement to die down a bit, for some of them to go to sleep, his chances of releasing Ellen would be better. It would not be hard for him to find her—not with Manape's sensitive nose to lead him to her.

But time passed and the apes, though apparently being urged to something by Apeman, watching Manape sullenly, apparently waiting for him to make some move.

Then, sharp as a knife, cutting through the other noises of the village, came Ellen's voice.

"Help, Lee! Help me!"

The scream was broken short off as though a hand had clutched the girl's throat, but Bentley waited for no more—and Manape-Bentley flew into action. His great hands went to the uprights of the stockade. His mighty shoulders heaved and twisted and the uprights were ripped apart.

The apes followed his lead, and the cracking of the stockade's uprights was like a volley of pistol shots. The great brutes fairly walked through the green saplings which formed the prison. Manape was leading the charge, and the apes, once through, did not hesitate. If their leader charged the blacks they would follow—and did, while among them danced, cavorted and gibbered the travesty, Apeman.

He was Bentley's lieutenant, and Bentley-Manape was the lord of the apes. Just now he forgot that he was more ape than man. Just now he was happy that his

strength was the strength of many men. He was hurrying to the assistance of the woman he loved.

Behind him came the great apes, following like an army of poorly trained recruits, yet armed as no army has ever been armed since the days when men fought with fist and fang against their enemies. Bentley lumbered swiftly toward the sound of Ellen's voice, aided in his journey by the odor of her which came to his sensitive ape's nostrils.

The blacks never saw the approach of the apes, until, led by Manape the Mighty, the great apes were right among them. Bentley did not pause. A black man saw him and shrieked aloud in terror, a shriek which seemed to freeze the other blacks in all sorts of postures. Sitting men remained where they sat, and some of the motionless ones saved their lives by their immobility. Dancers paused in midstride, and those who did not, died.

For the hands of the great apes clutched at everything that moved, and the great shoulders bulged, and the mighty muscles cracked, and men

were torn asunder as though they had been flies in the hands of vengeful boys.

The black who had shrieked hurled a spear, purely a reflex, perhaps—an action born of its habitual use. It missed Bentley by a narrow margin, but passed through the stomach of the she who had nursed Apeman. Snarling, snapping at the thing which hurt her, the she tore the weapon free—then waddled forward swiftly, caught the man who had hurled the spear, and tore his head off with a single twisting movement of her great hands.

Next moment her blood was mingling with that of her slayer as she fell above him. But her hands, in the convulsions of death, still ripped and tore, and the black whom she held was a ghastly thing when the she was finally dead. Bentley did not see the ghastly end of the spearman, for he was seeking Ellen, and at the same time keeping a close watch on Apeman.

Apeman seemed to be urging the apes to the attack, bidding them rip and tear and gnash, and the apes were doing that, making of the village a crimson

shambles. But they did it in passing, for Manape was their leader, and him they followed—and he was seeking Ellen Estabrook.

The door of the hut in which his nostrils told him she would be found, gave before his mighty chest as though it had been made of paper. Inside, in the glow of the native lamp, a huge black man cowered against the further wall of the hut, with spear poised.

But the black man seemed frozen with terror.

"Lee! Lee!"

Bentley essayed one glance at her. In the other corner she was, with the upper part of her clothing almost torn from her body.

Then the spearman hurled his weapon. Bentley strove to force the huge bulk of Manape's body to dodge the spear; but that body was slow in doing so—and took a mortal wound!

But it was a wound that would mean slow death. An

aching, terrible wound. Then Manape-Bentley had grasped the body of the black, lifted it high above his head, and crashed it to the hard packed floor of the hut. The hut fairly shook with the thud of that fall. At once Manape stooped, caught the black by the ankles and pulled in opposite direction with all his terrific might.

Then he whirled, masking what he had done from Ellen's sight with his huge, sorely wounded body.

He tried to send her a message with his eyes, but it was not necessary. She knew Manape, Barter's trained ape. She followed close at his heels. Outside the hut's door Apeman still urged the apes to destruction of men and property, of women and children. The village of the blacks had become a place of horror.

"Hurry, Lee!" gasped Ellen. "You've been grievously wounded, and if Manape dies, nothing can save you—and I shall not care to live!"

But Bentley knew. His brain could sense the approach

of death, and what he now must do was very plain.

He charged at Apeman and caught the struggling, snarling travesty up in his mighty arms. Then, with Ellen at his heels, he leaped into the jungle and began the race for the house of Caleb Barter.

Life was going from him, yet his brain forced onward the body of Manape. Behind came the great apes, following their leader. Now and again they screamed and snarled at him, but he paid them no heed. They could follow or leave him, as they chose. They chose to follow.

Apeman fought and bit at Bentley, but he paid him as little heed as though he had been nothing at all. Now and again when Ellen faltered Bentley caught her up, too, and carried her with Apeman until Ellen was rested enough to go on.

Some of the apes appeared to realize whither they were going, for they took to the trees and vanished onward. With Apeman alone, Bentley himself would have taken to the trees as the swiftest way back to

Barter's dwelling. But Ellen could not race along the upper terraces, and Bentley could not carry both Apeman and Ellen and leave the ground. But he could travel swiftly on his race with death, with Ellen as the prize if he won.

The hours passed, and the strength of Manape decreased; but fiercely the brain of Bentley drove the mighty body on. Ellen sobbed with weariness but continued on, and no words were spoken. There was no time for words. Now and again Bentley forced Apeman to walk, and dragged him forward with a hand clutching his wrist. At such times Bentley carried Ellen, and scarcely slackened his stride under her weight.

Once he tried to force Apeman to carry her, but the arms of Apeman were not equal to the task for more than fifty yards or so, and he gave that up as being impracticable. His brain raced, thinking up ways to travel faster, to reach Barter's quarters before the mighty body of Manape should die, and with it the brain of Bentley.

Surely no stranger cavalcade ever before traversed the jungles of the Black Continent.

So they came at last to the clearing. The apes protested and remained in hiding, while Bentley, never pausing, raced across toward the house he would never forget.

The body of Manape was almost through, for it staggered like a drunken man. Blood covered the mighty chest, and the brain of Bentley felt hazy; nothing made sense; and the end was very near.

But they reached the door of Barter's dwelling, and Barter himself met them, bearing his cruel whip in his hand. Ellen roused herself from her extreme exhaustion and clutched at the scientist's hand.

"Professor Barter!" she begged. "Please, please! Manape is almost dead! Hurry! Hurry, for the love of God!"

"There, there, my dear young lady," said Barter soothingly. "Make yourself easy. There's no cause for

worry."

Manape-Bentley toppled forward on the floor of the cabin. Ellen screamed and Barter comforted her. Apeman tried to escape to the jungle, but the lash of Barter drove him cowering and whimpering to a corner.

Then, oblivion—save that somewhere was the odor of violets. Or did violets possess odor? Then, if not, the odor of flowers he thought were violets.

Chapter 13: The Horror Passes

Slowly consciousness returned to Bentley, and his first thought was one of horror. From somewhere distinct came a doleful wailing sound. He thought he knew what it was—the mourning of great apes over a member that had died.

He had read somewhere that the great apes sorrowed when any of their members died. Bentley opened his eyes. He could make out the ceiling of a room that he recognized. It was the room that had been first assigned him in the dwelling of Barter.

Ellen Estabrook would be somewhere nearby. He opened his lips to call to her. Then he remembered. He'd tried to call to her before—and had merely bellowed like an ape. No, there was something he must know first.

His arms and hands seemed as heavy as lead, but he lifted them and looked at them—and a great feeling of peace descended upon him. Manape-Bentley was gone, and he was plain Lee Bentley again. There was

his own ring, which Apeman had worn, and besides he had just spoken aloud, softly, for no ears save his own, and the voice had been Lee Bentley's voice.

Yes, Barter had kept his promise, and Lee Bentley was Lee Bentley again.

But he was very weak, and his body was racked with pain. His hands and arms were covered with bandages. His body seemed packed in concrete, so moveless was it, and when he raised his voice it was terribly weak.

"Ellen," he managed to call; and again, "Ellen, darling!"

Instantly there came a swift patter of feet and Ellen was beside his bed, on her knees, covering his face—what there was of it unbandaged—with kisses. There was really no need for words between these two.

"Lee," she whispered, "I've been so afraid. You've been like this for a week, despite the miraculous knowledge and skill of Professor Barter. I've waited in

fear and trembling, praying for you to live, and now you are Lee again, and will live on. Professor Barter has promised me. All you need now is food, and care, and I shall shower you with both. Barter has instructed me so carefully that I could manage even to care for you, sick as you are, without him here at all."

"And Manape?" Bentley's voice seemed to be stronger.

"He is dead," whispered Ellen. "I shall never forget him. There was something great, something even better than human about him, Lee! Oh, I know that he was you—but where would all three of us have been had it not been for the powerful body of Manape, the great ape? Manape is dead, and in the jungle hereabouts the great apes mourn his passing. They've been wailing almost like human beings for a week. Manape—well, Professor Barter told me that you too would have died, had Manape reached his door five minutes later. As it was, he, and you, were just in time!"

"It's amazing," whispered Bentley, "that the great apes stay around here now that Manape is dead."

"Yes. It's strange—and terrible I think. There have been times when I felt they were waiting for something, for Professor Barter, perhaps. I've had the feeling they believe he killed their leader."

Now the two became silent, and Ellen held the bruised and broken hands of Bentley in both her own, and their eyes said things, one to the other, which eyes say so much better than lips do. They kissed each other softly, and Ellen crooned with ecstasy, her cheek against Bentley's.

Then Caleb Barter entered.

"Well, well," he said, "when a man is in condition to make love to a woman, he is well on the road to recovery. It won't hurt you to talk now, Bentley, and before I begin asking questions, let me assure you that you will suffer no ill effects from your experience."

"What of my memories?" asked Bentley softly.

"Forget them!" snapped Barter tartly. "That is, after you have told me everything that has happened. Miss Estabrook has already told me her angle of the experiment. Now, talk please—and then I shall make you well, and you shall both go into the world with me, and tell people that what I have to tell is true!"

So Bentley talked. Barter wrote like a man possessed. His fingers raced over the paper, repeating the words which fell from the lips of Lee Bentley, beside whom Ellen sat, holding his hands. Now and again Barter uttered an ejaculation of fierce joy. He was like a child with a toy that pleased him beyond words. He could scarcely wait for the words to spill from the lips of Lee Bentley.

When Bentley paused for breath, Barter exclaimed impatiently, and urged him to greater speed. He thought of but one thing, his experiment.

And so at last Bentley had finished.

"That's all, Professor Barter!" he said softly.

"All!" cried Barter. "Everything! Fame! Wealth! Adulation! There is nothing in the world Caleb Barter may not have when this story is told! I can scarcely contain myself. You must hurry to be well in order that the world may be told at once."

Laughing immoderately, Barter piled the manuscript he had written, and weighted it with a piece of rock. His face was a constant grin. His fingers trembled with eagerness. He could not contain himself.

Finally, as though from sheer joy of what he had accomplished, he raced from the cabin, and out across the clearing. Ellen and Bentley smiled at each other. Moments passed. Still came to their ears the mourning wails of the great apes.

Then suddenly there broke a sound so utterly appalling that the two were frozen with terror for a moment. First it was the laughter of Caleb Barter. Then, mingled with the laughter, the bellowing, frightful and paralyzing, of man apes challenging a

hated enemy. The drumming of ape fists on huge barrel chests. Then the laughter of Barter, dying away, ironic, terrible, into silence. Immediately afterward, high-pitched, mighty as the jungle itself, the concerted cries of half a dozen apes, as if bellowing their joy of the kill.

"They—they—" began Ellen in a choked voice. "The apes must have got Professor Barter!"

Silently Bentley nodded, and pointed.

Coiled on a nail near the door was Barter's whip. In his excitement he had gone into the jungle without it for the first—and last—time.

"There is one thing to do," whispered Ellen, "before we prepare to get you fully well. I shall care for you, and we shall both try to forget. And then we shall return to our own people."

"And the one thing?" asked Bentley.

The strained silence was suddenly broken by the

bellowing of the great apes, which now charged into the cabin. Bentley and Ellen cringed back from the murderous brutes to no avail. There was no denying them. Their slavering jaws, drooled below flaring nostrils, their eyes emitted sparks of animal fury. Bentley leaped to the girl and interposed his body between hers and the vanguard of the apes, who now were surging into the room through the open door, and spreading apart within like water released from a dam.

The apes were bent on murder, there could be no doubt.

A very monster towered over Bentley. His jaws were wide, his little red eyes fixed on the white man's neck. His great arms were coming forward to gather in both Ellen and Bentley—whom he could crush as easily as he crushed the grubs which were his food.

Bentley was helpless and knew it. This was the end for Ellen and himself. He must meet it unafraid. He tensed, awaiting the descent of bestial destruction. His eyes met the murderous gleam in the eyes of the

ape leader unflinchingly. And then the miracle happened.

The brute became suddenly and inexplicably hesitant. His bellow died away to a gurgling murmur in which there seemed somehow a hint of apology. The fire went out of his eyes. His jaws closed with a snap. His great arms, already about Bentley, slid harmlessly over Bentley's shoulders; dropped to his shaggy side.

The brute's little eyes looked long and in puzzled fashion into the eyes of Bentley. Then he began to chatter, and in a moment the other apes ambled grotesquely toward the door and out. Ellen and Bentley were alone together once more, unharmed—though numbed by realization of the near passing of disaster.

"I don't understand it," muttered Bentley, brushing the beads of perspiration from his brow. "It was a miracle!"

"Lee," Ellen answered, "I think I know, and it is a sort of miracle. Somehow the apes felt that you were—"

whatever your guise—Manape. They did not recognize you by any of their means of recognition; yet that beast knew! How? Only God Himself might answer. But the beasts knew, and did not slay us. The inner voice which whispers inside us in times of crises, whispers also to the great apes! Barter, then must have understood their somehow spiritual kinship with us. His experiments—"

Her words reminded Bentley of what she had been saying when the great apes had charged in upon them, murder bent. He interrupted her, gently.

"And the one thing we must do?" he rallied her.

Ellen rose, and her face was white and strained as she gathered together Barter's manuscript. This she carried to the fireplace. She applied a match and returned to Bentley's bedside. Then, side by side, the two who would never forget in any case watched the record of Barter's unholy experiment burn slowly to ashes, while the screams of the great apes died away second by second, proof that they were leaving this section of the jungle—going deeper and deeper into

the forest gloom which was their rightful heritage,
and from which no man had a right to take them.

90 Holocaust by Charles Willard Diffin

The extraordinary story of "Paul," who for thirty days was Dictator of the World.

Aproximate word count: 11,200

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

I am more accustomed to the handling of steel ingots and the fabrication of ships than to building with words. But, if I cannot write history as history is written, perhaps I can write it the way it is lived, and that must suffice.

This account of certain events must have a title, I am told. I have used, as you see: "Holocaust."

Inadequate!—but what word can tell even faintly of that reign of terror that engulfed the world, of those terrible thirty days in America when dread and horror gripped the nation and the red menace, like a wall of

fire, swept downward from the north? And, at last—the end!

It was given to me to know something of that conflict and of its ending and of the man who, in that last day, took command of Earth's events and gave battle to Mars, the God of War himself. It was against the background of war that he stood out; I must tell it in that way; and perhaps my own experience will be of interest. Yet it is of the man I would write more than the war—the most hated man in the whole world—that strange character, Paul Stravovinski.

You do not even recognize the name. But, if I were to say instead the one word, "Paul"—ah, now I can see some of you start abruptly in sudden, wide-eyed attention, while the breath catches in your throats and the memory of a strange dread clutches your hearts.

'Straki,' we called him at college. He was never "Paul," except to me alone; there was never the easy familiarity between him and the crowd at large, whose members were "Bill" and "Dick" and other

nicknames unprintable.

But "Straki" he accepted. "Bien, mon cher ami," he told me—he was as apt to drop into French as Russian or any of a dozen other languages—"a name—what is it? A label by which we distinguish one package of goods from a thousand others just like it! I am unlike: for me one name is as good as another. It is what is here that counts,"—he tapped his broad forehead that rose high to the tangle of black hair—"and here,"—and this time he placed one hand above his heart.

"It is for what I give to the world of my head and my heart that I must be remembered. And, if I give nothing—then the name, it is less than nothing."

Dreamer—poet—scientist—there were many Paul Strakis in that one man. Brilliant in his work—he was majoring in chemistry—he was a mathematician who was never stopped. I've seen him pause, puzzled by some phase of a problem that, to me, was a blank wall. Only a moment's hesitation and he would go way down to the bed-rock of mathematics and come up with a brand new formula of his own devising. Then

—"Voila! C'est fini! let us go for a walk, friend Bob; there is some poetry that I have remembered—" And we would head out of town, while he spouted poetry by the yard—and made me like it.

I wish you could see the Paul Straki of those days. I wish I could show him to you; you would understand so much better the "Paul" of these later times.

Tall, he seemed, though his eyes were only level with mine, for his real height was hidden beneath an habitual stoop. It let him conceal, to some extent, his lameness. He always walked with a noticeable limp, and here was the cause of the only bitterness that, in those days, was ever reflected in his face.

"Cossacks!" he explained when he surprised a questioning look upon my face. "They went through our village. I was two years old—and they rode me down!"

But the hard coldness went from his eyes, and again they crinkled about with the kindly, wise lines that seemed so strange in his young face. "It is only a

reminder to me," he added, "that such things are all in the past; that we are entering a new world where savage brutality shall no longer rule, and the brotherhood of man will be the basis upon which men shall build."

And his face, so homely that it was distinctive, had a beauty all its own when he dared to voice his dreams.

It was this that brought about his expulsion from college. That was in 1935 when the Vornikoff faction brought off their coup d'etat and secured a strangle hold on Russia. We all remember the campaign of propaganda that was forced into the very fibre of every country, to weaken with its insidious dry-rot the safe foundations of our very civilization. Paul was blinded by his idealism, and he dared to speak.

He was conducting a brilliant research into the structure of the atom; it ended abruptly with his dismissal. And the accepted theories of science went unchallenged, while men worked along other lines than Paul's to attempt the release of the tremendous energy that is latent in all matter.

I saw him perhaps three times in the four years that followed. He had a laboratory out in a God-forsaken spot where he carried on his research. He did enough analytical work to keep him from actual starvation, though it seemed to me that he was uncomfortably close to that point.

"Come with me," I urged him; "I need you. You can have the run of our laboratories—work out the new alloys that are so much needed. You would be tremendously valuable."

He had mentioned Maida to me, so I added: "And you and Maida can be married, and can live like a king and queen on what my outfit can pay you."

He smiled at me as he might have done toward a child. "Like a king and queen," he said. "But, friend Bob, Maida and I do not approve of kings and queens, nor do we wish to follow them in their follies.

"It is hard waiting,"—I saw his eyes cloud for a moment—"but Maida is willing. She is working, too—she is up in Melford as you know—and she has faith in

my work. She sees with me that it will mean the release of our fellow-men and women from the poverty that grinds out their souls. I am near to success; and when I give to the world the secret of power, then—" But I had to read in his far-seeing eyes the visions he could not compass in words.

That was the first time. I was flying a new ship when next I dropped in on him. A sweet little job I thought it then, not like the old busses that Paul and I had trained in at college, where the top speed was a hundred and twenty. This was an A. B. Clinton cruiser, and the "A.B.C.'s" in 1933 were good little wagons, the best there were.

I asked Paul to take a hop with me and fly the ship. He could fly beautifully; his lameness had been no hindrance to him. In his slender, artist hands a ship became a live thing.

"Are you doing any flying?" I asked, but the threadbare suit made his answer unnecessary.

"I'll do my flying later," he said, "and when I do,"—he

waved contemptuously toward my shining, new ship —"you'll scrap that piece of junk."

The tone matched the new lines in his face—deep lines and bitter. This practical world has always been hard on the dreamers.

Poverty; and the grinding struggle that Maida was having; the expulsion from college when he was assured of a research scholarship that would have meant independence and the finest of equipment to work with—all this, I found, was having its effect. And he talked in a way I didn't like of the new Russia and of the time that was near at hand when her communistic government should sweep the world of its curse of capitalistic control. Their propaganda campaign was still going on, and I gathered that Paul had allied himself with them.

I tried to tell him what we all knew; that the old Russia was gone, that Vornikoff and his crowd were rapacious and bloodthirsty, that their real motives were as far removed from his idealism as one pole from the other. But it was no use. And I left when I

saw the light in his eyes. It seemed to me then that Paul Stravovinski had driven his splendid brain a bit beyond its breaking point.

Another year—and Paris, in 1939, with the dreaded First of May drawing near. There had been rumors of demonstrations in every land, but the French were prepared to cope with them—or so they believed.... Who could have coped with the menace of the north that was gathering itself for a spring?

I saw Paul there. It lacked two days of the First of May, and he was seated with a group of industrious talkers at a secluded table in a cafe. He crossed over when he saw me, and drew me aside. And I noticed that a quiet man at a table nearby never let us out of his sight. Paul and his companions, I judged, were under observation.

"What are you doing here now?" he asked. His manner was casual enough to anyone watching, but the tense voice and the look in his eyes that bored into me were anything but casual.

My resentment was only natural. "And why shouldn't I be here attending to my own affairs? Do you realize that you are being rather absurd?"

He didn't bother to answer me directly. "I can't control them," he said. "If they would only wait—a few weeks—another month! God, how I prayed to them at —"

He broke off short. His eyes never moved, yet I sensed a furtiveness as marked as if he had peered suspiciously about.

Suddenly he laughed aloud, as if at some joking remark of mine; I knew it was for the benefit of those he had left and not for the quiet man from the Surete. And now his tone was quietly conversational.

"Smile!" he said. "Smile, Bob!—we're just having a friendly talk. I won't live another two hours if they think anything else. But, Bob, my friend—for God's sake, Bob, leave Paris to-night. I am taking the midnight plane on the Transatlantic Line. Come with me—"

One of the group at the table had risen; he was sauntering in our direction. I played up to Paul's lead.

"Glad I ran across you," I told him, and shook his extended hand that gripped mine in an agony of pleading. "I'll be seeing you in New York one of these days; I am going back soon."

But I didn't go soon enough. The unspoken pleading in Paul Stravovinski's eyes lost its hold on me by another day. I had work to do; why should I neglect it to go scuttling home because someone who feared these swarming rats had begged me to run for cover? And the French people were prepared. A little rioting, perhaps; a pistol shot or two, and a machine-gun that would spring from nowhere and sweep the street—!

We know now of the document that the Russian Ambassador delivered to the President of France, though no one knew of it then. He handed it to the portly, bearded President at ten o'clock on the morning of April thirtieth. And the building that had housed the Russian representatives was empty ten minutes later. Their disguises must have been ready,

for if the sewers of Paris had swallowed them they could have vanished no more suddenly.

And the document? It was the same in substance as those delivered in like manner in every capital of Europe: twenty-four hours were given in which to assure the Central Council of Russia that the French Government would be dissolved, that communism would be established, and that its executive heads would be appointed by the Central Council.

And then the bulletins appeared, and the exodus began. Papers floated in the air; they blew in hundreds of whirling eddies through the streets. And they warned all true followers of the glorious Russian faith to leave Paris that day, for to-morrow would herald the dawn of a new heaven on earth—a Communistic heaven—and its birth would come with the destruction of Paris....

I give you the general meaning though not the exact words. And, like the rest, I smiled tolerantly as I saw the stream of men and women and frightened children that filtered from the city all that day and

night; but I must admit that our smiles were strained as morning came on the First of May, and the hour of ten drew near.

Paris, the beautiful—that lovely blossom, flowering on the sturdy stalk that was La Belle France! Paris, laughing to cover its unspoken fears that morning in May, while the streets thudded to the feet of marching men in horizon blue, and the air above was vibrant with the endless roar of planes.

This meant war; and mobilization orders were out; yet still the deadly menace was blurred by a feeling of unreality. A hoax!—a huge joke!—it was absurd, the thought of a distant people imposing their will upon France! And yet ... and yet....

There were countless eyes turned skyward as a thousand bells rang out the hour of ten; and countless ears heard faintly the sound of gunfire from the north.

My work had brought me into contact with high officials of the French Government; I was privileged to stand with a group of them where a high-roofed

building gave a vantage point for observation. With them I saw the menacing specks on the horizon; I saw them come on with deadly deliberation—come on and on in an ever-growing armada that filled the sky.

Wireless had brought the report of their flight high over Germany; it was bringing now the story of disaster from the northern front. A heavy air-force had been concentrated there; and now the steady stream of radio messages came on flimsy sheets to the group about me, while they clustered to read the incredible words. They cursed and glared at one another, those French officials, as if daring their fellows to believe the truth; then, silent and white of face, they reached numbly for each following sheet that messengers brought—until they knew at last that the air-force of France was no more....

The roar of the approaching host was deafening in our ears. Red—red as blood!—and each unit grew to enormous proportions. Armored cruisers of the air—dreadnaughts!—they came as a complete surprise.

"But the city is ringed with anti-aircraft batteries," a

uniformed man was whispering. "They will bring the brutes down."

The northern edge of the city flamed to a roaring wall of fire; the batteries went into action in a single, crashing harmony that sang triumphantly in our ears. A few of the red shapes fell, but for each of these a hundred others swept down in deadly, directed flight.

A glass was in my hand; my eyes strained through it to see the silvery cylinders that fell from the speeding ships. I saw the red cruisers sweep upward before the inferno of exploding bombs raged toward them from below. And where the roar of batteries had been was only silence.

The fleet was over the city. We waited for the rain of bombs that must come; we saw the red cloud move swiftly to continue the annihilation of batteries that still could fire; we saw the armada pass on and lose itself among cloud-banks in the west.

Only a dozen planes remained, high-hung in the upper air. We stared in wonderment at one another. Was this

mercy?—from such an enemy? It was inconceivable!

"Mercy!" I wonder that we dared to think the word. Only an instant till a whistling shriek marked the coming of death. It was a single plane—a giant shell—that rode on wings of steel. It came from the north, and I saw it pass close overhead. Its propeller screamed an insolent, inhuman challenge. Inhuman—for one glance told the story. Here was no man-flown plane: no cockpit or cabin, no gunmounts. Only a flying shell that swerved and swung as we watched. We knew that its course was directed from above; it was swung with terrible certainty by a wireless control that reached it from a ship overhead.

Slowly it sought its target: deliberately it poised above it. An instant, only, it hung, though the moment, it seemed, would never end—then down!—and the blunt nose crashed into the Government buildings where at that moment the Chamber of Deputies was in session ... and where those buildings had been was spouting masonry and fire.

A man had me by the arm; his fingers gripped into my

flesh. With his other hand he was pointing toward the north. "Torpedoes!" he was saying. "Torpedoes of a size gigantic! Ah, mon Dieu! mon Dieu! Save us for we are lost!"

They came in an endless stream, those blood-red projectiles; they announced their coming with shrill cries of varying pitch; and they swung and swerved, as the ships above us picked them up, to rake the city with mathematical precision.

Incendiary, of course: flames followed every shattering burst. Between us and the Seine was a hell of fire—a hell that contained unnumbered thousands of what an instant before had been living folk—men and women clinging in a last terrified embrace—children whose white faces were hidden in their mothers' skirts or buried in bosoms no longer a refuge for childish fears. I saw it as plainly as if I had been given the far-reaching vision of a god ... and I turned and ran with stumbling feet where a stairway awaited....

If that flight, only a blurred recollection has stayed

with me. I pray God that I may never see it more clearly. There are sights that mortal eyes cannot behold with understanding and leave mortal brain intact. It is like an anaesthetic at such times, the numbness that blocks off the horrors the eyes are recording—like the hurt of the surgeon's scalpel that never reaches to the brain.

Dimly I see the fragmentary scenes: the crashing fall of buildings that come crumbling and thundering down, myself crawling like an insect across the wreckage—it is slippery and wet where the stones are red, and I stumble, then see the torn and mangled thing that has caused me to fall.... A face regards me from another mound. I see the dust of powdered masonry still settling upon it: the dark hair is hardly disturbed about the face, so peaceful, so girlishly serene: I am still wondering dully why there is only the head of that girl resting on the shattered stone, as I lie there exhausted and watch the next torpedo crash a block behind me.... The air is shrill with flying fragments. I wonder why my hands are stained and sticky as I run and crawl on my way. The red rocks

are less slippery now, and the rats, from the sewers of Paris!—they have come out to feed!

Fragments of pictures—and the worst of them gone! I know that night came—red night, under a cloud of smoke—and I found myself on the following day descending from a fugitive peasant's cart and plodding onward toward the markings of a commercial aerodrome.

They could not be everywhere, those red vultures of the sky, and they had other devils'-work to do. I had money, and I paid well for the plane that carried me through that day and a night to the Municipal Airport of New York.

The Red Army of occupation was halfway across communist Germany, hailed as they went as the saviors of the world. London had gone the way of Paris; Rome had followed; the countries of France and England and Italy were beaten to their knees.

"We who rule the air rule the world!" boasted General Vornikoff. The Russian broadcasting station had the

insolence to put on the air his message to the people of America. I heard his voice as plainly as if he stood in my office; and I was seeing again the coming of that endless stream of aerial torpedoes, and the red cruisers hanging in the heights to pick up control and dash the messengers of death upon a helpless city. But I was visioning it in New York.

"The masses of the American people are with us," said the complacently arrogant voice. "For our fellow-workers we have only brotherly affection; it is your capitalist-dominated Government that must submit. And if it does not—!" I heard him laugh before he went on:

"We are coming to the rescue of you, our brothers across the sea. Now we have work to do in Europe; our gains must be consolidated and the conquests of our glorious air-force made secure. And then—! We warn you in advance, and we laugh at your efforts to prepare for our coming. We even tell you the date: in thirty days the invasion begins. It will end only at Washington when the great country of America, its cruel shackles cast off from the laboring masses, joins

the Brotherhood—the Workers of the World!"

There was a man from the War Department who sat across from me at my desk; my factories were being taken over; my electric furnaces must pour out molten metal for use in war. He cursed softly under his breath as the voice ceased.

"The dirty dog!" he exclaimed. "The lying hypocrite! He talks of brotherhood to us who know the damnable inquisition and reign of terror that he and his crowd have forced on Russia! Thirty days! Well, we have three thousand planes ready for battle to-day; there'll be more in thirty days! Now, about that vanadium steel—"

But I'll confess I hardly heard him; I was hearing the roar of an armada of red craft that ensanguined the sky, and I was seeing the curving flight of torpedoes, each an airplane in itself....

Thirty days!—and each minute of each hour must be used. In close touch with the War Department, I knew much that was going on, and all that I knew was the

merest trifle in the vast preparations for defense. My earlier apprehensions were dulled; the sight I had of the whole force of a mighty nation welded into one driving power working to one definite end was exhilarating.

New York and Washington—these, it was felt, would be the points of first attack; they must be protected. And I saw the flights of planes that seemed endless as they converged at the concentration camps. Fighters, at first—bombers and swift scouts—they came in from all parts of the land. Then the passenger planes and the big mail-ships. Transcontinental runs were abandoned or cut to a skeleton service of a ship every hour for the transport of Government men. Even the slower craft of the feeder lines were commandeered; anything that could fly and could mount a gun.

And the three thousand fighting ships, as the man from Washington had said, grew to three times that number. Their roaring filled the skies with thunder, and beneath them were other camps of infantry and artillery.

The Atlantic front was an armed camp, where highways no longer carried thousands of cars on pleasure bent. By night and day I saw those familiar roads from the air; they were solid with a never-ending line of busses and vans and long processions of motorized artillery and tanks, whose clattering bedlam came to me a thousand feet above.

Yes, it was an inspiring sight, and I lost the deadly oppression and the sense of impending doom—until our intelligence service told us of the sailing of the enemy fleet.

They had seized every vessel in the waters of Europe. And—God pity the poor, traitorous devils who manned them—there were plenty to operate the ships. Two thousand vessels were in that convoy. Ringed in as they were by a guard of destroyers and fighting craft of many kinds, whose mast-heads carried the blood-red flag now instead of their former emblems, our submarines couldn't reach them.

But our own fleet went out to measure their strength, and a thousand Navy planes took the air on the

following day.

Uppermost in my own mind, and in everyone's mind, I think, was the question of air-force.

Would they bring the red ships? What was their cruising range? Could they cross the Atlantic with their enormous load of armored hull, or must they be transported? Were the air-cruisers with the fleet, or would they come later?

How Vornikoff and his assassins must have laughed as they built the monsters, armored them, and mounted the heavy guns so much greater than anything they would meet! The rest of us—all the rest of the world!—had been kept in ignorance.... And now our own fliers were sweeping out over the gray waters to find the answer to our questions.

I've tried to picture that battle; I've tried to imagine the feelings of those men on the dreadnaughts and battle-cruisers and destroyers. There was no attempt on the enemy's part to conceal his position; his wireless was crackling through the air with messages

that our intelligence department easily decoded. Our Navy fliers roared out over the sea, out and over the American fleet, whose every bow was a line of white that told of their haste to meet the oncoming horde.

The plane-carriers threw their fighters into the air to join the cavalcade above—and a trace of smoke over the horizon told that the giant fleet was coming into range.

And then, instead of positions and ranges flashed back from our own swift scouts, came messages of the enemy's attack. Our men must have seen them from the towers of our own fleet; they must have known what the red swarm meant, as it came like rolling, fire-lit smoke far out in the sky—and they must have read plainly their own helplessness as they saw our thousand planes go down. They were overwhelmed—obliterated!—and the red horde of air-cruisers was hardly checked in its sweep.

Carnage and destruction, those blue seas of the north Atlantic have seen; they could tell tales of brave men, bravely going to their death in storm and calm but

never have they seen another such slaughter as that day's sun showed.

The anti-aircraft guns roared vainly; some few of our own planes that had escaped returned to add their futile, puny blows. The waters about the ships were torn to foam, while the ships themselves were changed to furnaces of bursting flame—until the seas in mercy closed above them and took their torn steel, and the shattered bodies that they held, to the silence of the deep....

We got it all at Washington. I sat in a room with a group of white-faced men who stared blindly at a radiocone where a quiet voice was telling of disaster. It was Admiral Graymont speaking to us from the bridge of the big dreadnaught, Lincoln, the flagship of the combined fleet. Good old Graymont! His best friend, Bill Schuler, Secretary of the Navy, was sitting wordless there beside me.

"It is the end," the quiet voice was saying; "the cruiser squadrons are gone.... Two more battleships have gone down: there are only five of us left.... A squadron

of enemy planes is coming in above. Our men have fought bravely and with never a chance.... There!—they've got us!—the bombs! Good-by, Bill, old fellow —"

The radiocone was silent with a silence that roared deafeningly in our ears. And, beside me, I saw the Secretary of the Navy, a Navy now without ships or men, drop his tired, lined face into his hands, while his broad shoulders shook convulsively. The rest of us remained in our chairs, too stunned to do anything but look at one another in horror.

He expected them to strike at New York. I was sent up there, and it was there that I saw Paul again. I met him on lower Broadway, and I went up to him with my hand reaching for his. I didn't admire Paul's affiliations, but he had warned me—he had tried to save my life—and I wanted to thank him.

But his hand did not meet mine. There was a strange, wild look in his eyes—I couldn't define it—and he brought his gaze back from far off to stare at me as if I were a stranger.

Then: "Still got that A.B.C. ship?" he demanded.

"Yes," I answered wonderingly.

"Junk it!" he said. And his laugh was as wild and incomprehensible as his look had been. I stared after him as he walked away. I was puzzled, but there were other things to think of then.

A frenzy of preparation—and all in vain. The enemy fooled us; the radio brought the word from Quebec.

"They have entered the St. Lawrence," was the message it flashed. Then, later: "The Red fleet is passing toward Montreal. Enemy planes have spotted all radio towers. There is one above us now—" And that ended the message from Quebec.

But we got more information later. They landed near Montreal; they were preparing a great base for offensive operations; the country was overrun with a million men; the sky was full of planes by night and day; there was no artillery, no field guns of any sort, but there were torpedo-planes by tens of thousands,

which made red fields of waiting death where trucks placed them as they took them from the ships.

And there were some of us who smiled sardonically in recollection of the mammoth plants the Vornikoff Reds had installed in Central Russia, and the plaudits that had greeted their plans for nitrogen fixation. They were to make fertilizers; the nitrates would be distributed without cost to the farms—this had pacified the Agrarians—and here were their "nitrates" that were to make fertile the fields of Russia: countless thousands of tons of nitro-explosives in these flying torpedoes!

But if we smiled mirthlessly at these recollections we worked while we chewed on our cud of bitterness. There came an order: "Evacuate New England," and the job was given to me.

With planes—a thousand of them—trucks, vans, the railroads, we gathered those terrified people into concentration camps, and took them over the ground, under the ground, and through the air to the distributing camp at Buffalo, where they were

scattered to other points.

I saw the preparations for a battle-front below me as I skimmed over Connecticut. Trenches made a thin line that went farther than I could see! Here was the dam that was expected to stop the enemy columns from the north. I think no one then believed that our air-force could check the assault. The men of the fighting planes were marked for death; one read it in their eyes; but who of us was not?

How those giant cruisers would be downed no man could say, but we worked on in a blind desperation; we would hold that invading army as long as men could sight a gun; we would hold them back; and somehow, somehow, we must find the means to repel the invasion from the air!

I saw the lines of track that made a network back to the trenches. Like the suburban lines around New York, they would carry thousands of single cars, each driven at terrific speed by the air plane propeller at its bow. With these, the commanders could shift their forces to whatever sector was hardest pressed. They

would be bombed, of course, but the hundreds of tracks would not all be destroyed—and the line must be held!

The line! it brought a strangling lump to my throat as I saw those thin markings of trenches, the marching bodies of troops, the brave, hopeless, determined men who went singing to their places in that line. But my planes were winging past me; my job was ahead, where a multitude still waited and prayed for deliverance.

We never finished the job; in two days the red horde was upon us. Their swarming troops were convoyed by planes, but no effort was made to fly over our lines and launch an attack. Were they feeling their way? Did they think now that they would find us passive and unresisting? Did they want to take our cities undamaged? Oh, we asked ourselves a thousand questions with no answer to any—except the knowledge that a million men were marching from the north; that their fleet of planes would attack as soon as the troops encountered resistance; that our batteries of anti-aircraft guns would harry them as

they came, and our air-fleet, held back in reserve, would take what the batteries left....

My last planes with their fugitive loads passed close to the lines of red troops. There were red planes overhead, but they let us pass unhindered. Fleeing, driving wildly toward the south, we were unworthy, it seemed, of even their contemptuous attention. But I was sick to actual nausea at sight of the villages and cities where only a part of the population had escaped. The roads, in front of the red columns, were jammed with motors and with men and women and children on foot: a hopeless tangle.

I was watching the pitiful flight below me, cursing my own impotence to be of help, when a shrill whistling froze me rigid to my controls. I had heard it before—there could be no mistaking the cry of that oncoming torpedo—and I saw the damnable thing pass close to my ship.

I was doing two hundred—my motor was throttled down—but this inhuman monster passed me as if my ship were frozen as unmoving as myself. It tore on

ahead. I saw an enemy plane above it some five thousand feet. The torpedo was checked; I saw it poise; then it curved over and down. And the screaming motor took up its cry that was like a thousand devils until its sound was lost in the screams from below and the infernal blast of its own explosion.

Only a trial flight—an experiment to test their controls! No need for me to try to tell you of the thoughts that tore me through and through while I struggled to bring my ship to an even keel in the hurricane of explosion that drove up at me from below. But I spat out the one word: "Brotherhood!" and I prayed for a place in the front line where I might send one shot at least against so beastly a foe.

That was somewhere in Massachusetts. Their foremost columns were close behind. They came to a stop some fifty miles from our waiting line of battle: I learned this when I got to Washington. And the reason, too, was known; it was published in all the papers. There had been messages to the President, broadcast to the world from an unknown source:

"To the President of the United States—warning! This war must end. You, as Commander-in-Chief of the American forces can bring it to a close. I have prevailed upon the Red Army of the Brotherhood to halt. They have listened to me. You, also, must take heed.

"You will issue orders at once to withdraw all resistance. You will disband your army, ground all your planes; bring all your artillery into one place and prepare to turn the government of this country over to the representatives of the Central Council. You will act at once."

"This war is ended. All wars are ended forevermore. I have spoken."

And the strange message was signed "Paul."

The wild words of a maniac, it was thought at first. Yet the fact remained that the enemy's advance had ceased. Who was this "Paul" who had "prevailed upon the Red Army" to halt?

And then the obvious answer occurred; it was a ruse on the part of the Reds. They feared to attack; their strength was not as great as we had thought—officers and men of all branches of the service took new heart and plunged more frenziedly still into the work of preparation.

There were direction-finders that had taken the message from several stations; their pointers converged upon one definite location in southern Ohio. Over an area of twenty square miles, that place was combed for a sending radio where the message could have originated—combed in vain.

The next demand came at ten on the following morning.

"To the President of the United States: You have disregarded my warning. You will not do so again; I have power to enforce my demands. I had hoped that bloodshed and destruction might cease, but it is plain that only that will save you from your own headstrong folly. I must strike. At noon to-day the Capitol in Washington will be destroyed. See that it is emptied

of human life. I have spoken. Paul."

A maniac, surely; yet a maniac with strange powers. For the graphs of the radio direction-finders showed a curve. And when they were assembled the reading could only mean that the instrument that had sent the threat had moved over fifty miles during the few minutes of its sending. This, I think, was what brought the order to vacate the big domed building in Washington.

Of course the Capitol Building had been searched; there was not a nook nor corner from roof to basement but had been gone over in search of an explosive machine. And now it was empty, and a guard of soldiers made a solid cordon surrounding it. No one could approach upon the ground; and, above, a series of circling patrol-planes, one squadron above another, guarded against approach by air. With such a defense the Capitol and its grounds seemed impregnable.

My watch said 11:59; I held it in my hand and watched the seconds tick slowly by. The city was

hushed; it seemed that no man was so much as breathing ... 11:59 :60!—and an instant later I heard the shriek of something that tore the air to screaming fragments. I saw it as it came on a straight, level line from the east; a flash like a meteor of glistening white. It passed beneath the planes, that were motionless by contrast, drove straight for the gleaming Capitol dome, passed above it, and swept on in a long flattened curve that bent outward and up.



It was gone from my sight, though the shrieking air was still tearing at my ears, when I saw the great building unfold. Time meant nothing; my racing mind made slow and deliberate the explosion that lifted the roofs and threw the walls in dusty masses upon the ground. So slow it seemed!—and I had not even seen the shell that the white meteor-ship had fired. Yet there was the beautiful building, expanding, disintegrating. It was a cloud of dust when the concussion reached me to dash me breathless to the earth....

he white meteor was the vehicle of "Paul," the dictator. From it had come the radio message whose source had moved so swiftly. I saw this all plainly.

There was a conference of high officials at the War Department Building, and the Secretary summed up all that was said:

"A new form of air-flight, and a new weapon more destructive than any we have known! That charge of explosive that was fired at the Capitol was so small as to be unseen. We can't meet it; we can only fight. Fight on till the end."

A message came in as we sat there, a message to the Commander-in-Chief who had come over from the White House under military guard.

"Surrender!" it demanded; "I have shown you my power; it is inexhaustible, unconquerable. Surrender or be destroyed; it is the dawn of a new day, the day of the Brotherhood of Man. Let bloodshed cease. Surrender! I command it! Paul."

The President of the United States held the flimsy paper in his hand. He rose slowly to his feet, and he read it aloud to all of us assembled there; read it to the last hateful word. Then:

"Surrender?" he asked. He turned steady, quiet eyes upon the big flag whose red and white and blue made splendid the wall behind him—and I'll swear that I

saw him smile.

We have had many presidents since '76; big men, some of them; tall, handsome men; men who looked as if nature had moulded them for a high place. This man was small of stature; the shortest man in all that room if he had stood, but he was big—big! Only one who is great can look deep through the whirling turmoil of the moment to find the eternal verities that are always underneath—and smile!

"Men must die,"—he spoke meditatively; in seeming communing with himself, as one who tries to face a problem squarely and honestly—"and nations must pass; time overwhelms us all. Yet there is that which never dies and never surrenders."

He looked about the room now, as if he saw us for the first time.

"Gentlemen," he said quietly, "we have here an ultimatum. It is backed by power which our Secretary of War says is invincible. We are faced by an enemy who would annihilate these United States, and this

new power fights on the side of the enemy.

"Must we go the way of England, of France, of all Europe? It would seem so. The United States of America is doomed. Yet each one of us will meet what comes bravely, if, facing our own end, we know that the principles upon which this nation is founded must go on; if only the Stars and Stripes still floats before our closing eyes to assure us that some future day will see the resurrection of truth and of honor and kindness among men.

"We will fight, as our Secretary of War has said—fight on to the end. We will surrender—never! That is our answer to this one who calls himself 'Paul.'"

We could not speak; I do not know how long the silence lasted. But I know that I left that room a silent man among many silent men, in whose eyes I saw a reflection of the emotion that filled my own heart. It was the end—the end of America, of millions of American homes—but this was better than surrender to such a foe. Better death than slavery to that race of bloodthirsty oppressors.

But who was "Paul?" This question kept coming repeatedly to my mind. The press of the country echoed the President's words, then dipped their pens in vitriol to heap scorching invective upon the head of the tyrant. The power of the Reds we might have met—or so it was felt—but this new menace gave the invaders a weapon we could not combat. It was power!—a means of flight beyond anything known!—an explosive beside which our nitro compounds were playthings for a child.

"Who is Paul?" It was not only myself who asked the question through those next long hours, but perhaps I was the only one in whose mind was a disturbing certainty that the answer was mine if I could but grasp it.

I was remembering Paris; I was thinking of that peaceful, happy city before the First of May, before the world had gone mad and a raging, red beast had laid it waste and overrun it. And of Paul Stravovinski—my friend "Straki" of college days—who had warned me. He had known what was coming. He himself had said that he had prayed to "them" for delay; that in a

few weeks he would do—what?... And suddenly I knew.

Paul had succeeded; his research had ended in the dissection of the atom; he had unleashed the sub-atomic power of matter. Only this could explain the wild flight through the sky, the terrific explosion at the Capitol. It was Paul—my friend, Paul Stravovinski—who was imposing his will upon the world.

I said nothing as I took off; the swiftest plane was at my command. I might be wrong; I must not arouse false hopes; but I must find Paul. And the papers were black with scareheads of another threat as I left Washington:

"You have twenty-four hours to surrender. There shall be one last day of grace." Signed: "Paul."

There was more of the wild talk of the beauties of this new dispensation—a mixture of idealistic folly and of threats of destruction. I needed no more to prove the truth of my suspicions. No one but the Paul I had known could cling so tenaciously to his dreams; no

one but he could be so blind to the actual horror of the new oligarchy he would impose upon the world.

I flew alone; no one but myself must try to hunt him out. I paid no attention to the radio direction of the last message; he would fly far afield to send it; distance meant nothing to one who held his power. I must look for him at his laboratory, that cluster of deserted buildings that stood all alone by a distant railway siding; it was there he had worked.

He met me with a pistol in his hand—a tiny gun that fired only a .22 calibre bullet.

"Put down your pop-gun," I told him and brushed through the open door into the room that had been his laboratory. "I am unarmed, and I'm here to talk business.

"You are 'Paul'!" I shot the sentence at him as if it were a bullet that must strike him down.

He did not answer directly; just nodded in confirmation of some unspoken thought.

"You have found me," he said slowly; "you were the only one I feared."

Then he came out with it, and his eyes blazed with a maniacal light.

"Yes, I am Paul! and this 'pop-gun' in my hand is the weapon that destroyed your Capitol at Washington. The bullet contained less than a grain of tritonite; that is the name I have given my explosive."

He aimed the little pistol toward me where I stood. "These bullets are more lightly charged—they are to protect myself—and the one ten-thousandth of a milligram in the end of each will blow you into bits! Sit down. I will not be checked now. You will never leave this place alive!"

"Less than a grain of tritonite!"—and I had seen a great building go down to dust at its touch! I sat down in the chair where he directed, and I turned away from the fanatical glare of Paul's eyes to look about me.

There was poverty here no longer; no makeshift apparatus greeted my eyes, but the finest of laboratory equipment. Paul read my thoughts.

"They have been liberal," he told me; "the Central Council has financed my work—though I have kept my whereabouts a secret even from them. But they would not wait. I told you in Paris, and you did not believe. And now—now I have succeeded! the research is done!"

He half turned to pick up a flake of platinum no larger than one's finger-nail; it was a weight that was used on a delicate balance.

"Matter is matter no longer," he said; "I have resolved it into energy. I hold here in my hand power to destroy an army, or to drive a fleet of ships. I, Paul, will build a new world. I will give to man a surcease from labor; I will give him rest; I will do the work of the world. My tritonite that can destroy can also create; it shall be used for that alone. This is the end of war. Here is wealth; here is power; I shall give it to mankind, and, under the rule of the Brotherhood, a

united world will arise and go forward to new growth, to a greater civilization, to a building of a new heaven on earth."

He was pacing up and down the room. His hands were shaking; the muscles of his face that twitched and trembled were moulded into deep lines. I sat there and realized that within that room, directly before my eyes, was the Dictator of the World. It was true—I could not doubt it—Paul Straki of college days had made his dreams come true; his research was ended. And this new "Paul" who held in those trembling hands the destinies of mankind, at whose word kings and presidents trembled, was utterly mad!

I tried to talk and tell him of the truth we knew was true. He would have none of it; his dreams possessed him. In the bloody flag of this new Russia he could see only the emblem of freedom; the men who marched beneath that banner were his brothers, unwitting in the destruction they wrought. It was all that they knew. But they fought for the right. They would cease fighting now, and would join him in the work of moulding a new race. And even their leaders, who

had sometimes opposed—were they not kind at heart? Had they not checked the advance of an irresistible army to give him and his new weapon an opportunity to open the eyes of the people? Theirs was no wish to destroy; their hearts ached for their victims who refused to listen and could be convinced only by force.

And as he talked on there passed before my eyes the vision of an aerial torpedo and a blood-red ship above, where these "kindly" men who were Paul's allies turned the instrument of death upon huddled, screaming folk—and laughed, no doubt, at such good sport.

I thought of many things. I was tensed one moment to throw myself upon the man; and an instant later I was searching my mind for some argument, some gleam of reason, with which I could tear aside the illusions that held him. I saw him cross the room where a radio stood, and he switched on the instrument for the news-broadcast service. The shouting of an excited voice burst into the room.

"The Reds have advanced," said the voice. "Their armies have crossed the Connecticut line. They are within ten miles of the American forces. The twenty-four hours of grace promised by the tyrant 'Paul' was a lie. The battle is already on."

I saw the tall figure of Paul sink to its former stoop; the lameness that had vanished in the moment of his exaltation had returned. He limped a pace or two toward me.

"They said they would wait!" His voice was a hoarse whisper. "General Vornikoff himself gave me his promise!"

I was on my feet, then. "What matter?" I shouted. "What difference does it make—a few hours or a day? Your damned patriots, your dear brothers in arms—they are destroying us this instant! And not one of our men but is worth more than the whole beastly mob!"

I was wild with the picture that came so clear and plain before my eyes. I had my pistol in my hand; I was tempted to fire. It was his whisper that stopped

me.

"They have crossed Massachusetts! And Maida is there in Melford!"

There was no resisting his strength that tore my weapon from me. His tritonite pistol was pressed into my side, and his hand upon my collar threw me ahead of him toward a rear room, then out into a huge shed. I had only a quick glimpse of the airplane that was housed there. It was a white cylinder, and the stern that was toward me showed a funnel-shaped port.

I was thrown by that same furious strength through a door of the ship; I saw Paul Stravoinski seat himself before some curious controls. The ship that held me rose; moved slowly through an opened door; and with a screech from the stern it tore off and up into the air.

I have said Paul could fly; but the terrific flight of the screaming thing that held us seemed beyond the power of man to control. I was stunned with the thundering roar and the speed that held me down and back against a cabin wall.

How he found Melford, I cannot know; but he found it as a homing pigeon finds its loft. He checked our speed with a sickening swiftness that made my brain reel. There were red ships above, but they let the white ship pass unchallenged. There were no Red soldiers on the ground—only the marks where they had passed.

From the distance came a never-ceasing thunder of guns. The village was quiet. It still burned, blazing brightly in places, again smouldering sluggishly and sending into the still air smoke clouds whose fumes were a choking horror of burned flesh. There were bodies in grotesque scattering about the streets; some of them were black and charred.

Paul Stravovinski took me with him as he dashed for a house that the flames had not touched. And I was with him as he smashed at the door and broke into the room.

There was splintered furniture about. A cabinet, whose glass doors had been wantonly smashed, leaned crazily above its fallen books, now torn,

scuffed and muddy upon the floor. Through a shattered window in the bed-room beyond came a puff of the acrid smoke from outside to strangle the breath in my throat. On the floor in a shadowed corner lay the body of a woman—a young woman as her clotted tangle of golden hair gave witness. She stirred and moaned half-consciously.... And the lined face of Paul Stravoinski was a terrible thing to see as he went stumblingly across the room to gather that body into his arms.

I had known Maida; I had seen their love begin in college days. I had known a laughing girl with sunshine in her hair, a girl whose soft eyes had grown so tenderly deep when they rested upon Paul—but this that he took in his arms, while a single dry sob tore harshly at his throat, this was never Maida!

There were red drops that struck upon his hands or fell sluggishly to the floor; the head and face had taken the blow of a clubbed rifle or a heavy boot. The eyes in that tortured face opened to rest upon Paul's, the lips were moving.

"I told them of you," I heard her whisper. "I told them that you would come—and they laughed."

Unconsciously she tried to draw her torn clothing about her, an instinctive reaction to some dim realization of her nakedness. She was breathing feebly. "And now—oh, Paul!—Paul!—you—have come—too late!"

I hardly think Paul knew I was there or sensed that I followed where he carried in his arms the bruised body that had housed the spirit of Maida. He flew homeward like a demon, but he moved as one in a dream.

Only when I went with him into the room where he had worked, did he turn on me in sudden fury.

"Out!" he screamed. "Get out of my sight! It is you who have done this—your damned armies who would not do as I ordered! If you had not resisted, if you had —"

I broke in there.

"Did we do that?" I outshouted him, and I pointed to the torn body on a cot. His eyes followed my shaking hand. "No, it was your brothers—your dear comrades who are bringing the brotherhood of men into the world! Well, are you proud? Are you happy and satisfied—with what your brothers do with women?"

It must be a fearful thing to have one's dreams turn bitter and poisonous. Paul Stravoinski seemed about to spring upon me. He was crouched, and the muscles of his thin neck were like wire; his face was a ghastly thing, his eyes so staring bright, and the sensitive mouth twisting horribly. But he sprang at last not at me but toward the door, and without a word from his tortured lips he opened it and motioned me out.

Even there I heard echoes of distant guns and the heavier, thudding sounds that must be their aerial torpedoes. My feet were leaden as I strained every muscle to hurry toward my ship. Through my mind was running the threat of the Russian, Vornikoff: "We even tell you the date: in thirty days." And this was the thirtieth day—thirty days that a state of war had existed.

The battle was on; the radio had spoken truly. I saw its raging fires as I came up from our rear where the gray-like smoke clouds shivered in the unending blast. But I saw stabbing flames that struck upward from the ground to make a wall of sharp, fiery spears, and I knew that every darting flame was launching a projectile from our anti-aircraft guns.

The skies were filled with the red aircraft of the enemy, but their way was an avenue of hell where thousands of shells filled the air with their crashing explosions. There were torpedoes, the unmanned airships whose cargo was death, and they were guided to their marks despite the inferno that raged about the red ships above.

I saw meteors that fell, the red flames that enveloped them no redder than the bodies of the ships. And, as I leaped from my plane that I had landed back of our lines, I sensed that the enemy was withdrawing.

There was a colonel of artillery—I had known him in days of peace—and he threw his arms around me and executed a crazy dance. "We've beaten them back,

Bob!" he shouted, and repeated it over and over in a delirium of joy.

I couldn't believe it; not those cruisers that I had seen over Paris. Another brief moment showed my fears were all too rational.

A shrieking hailstorm of torpedoes preceded them; the ships were directing them from afar. And, while some of the big shells went wild and overshot our lines, there were plenty that found their mark.

I was smashed flat by a stunning concussion. Behind me the place where Colonel Hartwell had stood was a smoking crater; his battery of guns had been blasted from the earth. Up and down the whole line, far beyond the range of my sight, the eruption continued. The ground was a volcano of flame, as if the earth had opened to let through the interior fires, and the air was filled with a litter of torn bodies and sections of shattered guns.

No human force could stand up under such a bombardment. Like others about me, I gripped tight

upon something within me that was my self-control, and I marveled that I yet lived while I waited for the end.

Beyond the smoke clouds was a hillside, swarming with figures in red; solid masses of troops that came toward us. Above was the red fleet, passing safely above our flame-blasted lines; there were bombs falling upon those batteries here and there whose fire was unsilenced. And then, from the south, came a roar that pierced even the bedlam about me. The sun shone brightly there where the smoke-clouds had not reached, and it glinted and sparkled from the wings of a myriad of our planes.

There was something that pulled tight at my throat; I know I tore at it with fumbling hands, as if that something were an actual band that had clamped down and choked me, while I stared at that true line of sharp-pointed V's. The air-force of the United States had been ordered in; and they were coming, coming—to an inevitable death!

I tried to tear my eyes away from that oncoming fleet,

but I could not move. I saw their first contact with the enemy; so small, they were, in contrast with the big red cruisers. They attacked in formations; they drove down and in; and they circled and whirled before they fluttered to earth....

Dimly, through the stupor that numbed my brain, I heard men about me shouting with joy. I felt more than saw the fall of a monster red craft; it struck not far away. The voices were thanking God—for what? Another red ship fell—and another; and through all the roaring inferno a sound was tearing—a ripping, terrible scream that went on and on. And above me, when I forced my eyes upward, was a flash of white.

It darted like a live thing among the red ones whose guns blazed madly—and the red ships in clotted groups fell away and over and down as the white one passed. They had been burst open where some power had blasted them, and their torn hulls showed gaping as they fell.

For a time the air was silent and empty above; the white, flashing thing had passed from sight, for the

line of red ships was long. Then again it returned, and it threw itself into the mad whirl in the south where the air-force of the American people was fighting its last fight.

I was screaming insanely as I saw it come back. The white ship!—the blast of vapor from its funneled stern—It was Paul!—Paul Stravovinski!—Paul the Dictator!—and he was fighting on our side!

His ship had been prepared; I had seen the machine-guns on her bow. Paul was working them from within, and every bullet was tipped with the product of his brain—the deadly tritonite!

The white flash swung wide in a circle that took it far away. It came back above the advancing army of the Reds. It swerved once wildly, then settled again upon its course, and the raging hell that the Reds had turned loose upon our lines was as nothing to the destruction that poured upon the Red troops from above.

A messenger of peace, that ship; I knew well why Paul

had painted it white. And, instead of peace—!

He was flying a full mile from our lines, yet the torn earth and great boulders crashed among us even then. There were machine-guns firing ceaselessly from the under side of the ship. What charges of tritonite had the demented man placed in those shells?

Below and behind it, as it flashed across our view, was a fearful, writhing mass where the earth itself rose up in unending, convulsive agony. A volcano of fire followed him, a fountain of earth that ripped and tore and stretched itself in a writhing, tortured line across the land as the white ship passed.

No man who saw that and lived has found words to describe the progress of that monstrous serpent; the valley itself is there for men to see. The roar was beyond the limit of men's strained nerves. I found myself cowering upon the ground when the white ship came back; I followed it fearfully with my eyes until I saw it swoop falteringly down. Such power seemed not for men but for gods; I could not have met Paul

Stravoinski then but in a posture of supplication. But I leaped to my feet and raced madly across the torn earth as I saw the white ship touch the ground—rise—fall again—and end its flight where it ploughed a furrow across a brown field....

I raised Paul Stravoinski's head in my arms where I found him in the ship. An enemy shell had entered that cabin; it must have come early in the fight, but he had fought gamely on. And the eyes that looked up into mine had none of the wild light I had seen. They were the eyes of Paul Straki, the comrade of those few long years before, and he smiled as he said: "Voila, friend Bob: c'est fini! And now I go for a long, long walk. We will talk of poetry, Maida and I...."

But his dreams were still with him. He opened his eyes to stare intently at me. "You will see that it is not in vain?" he questioned; then smiled as one who is at peace, as he whispered: "Yes, I know you will—my friend, Bob—"

And his fixed gaze went through and beyond me, while he tried, in broken sentences, to give the vision

that had been his. So plain it was to him now.

"The wild work—of a mistaken people. America will undo it.... A world at peace.... The vast commerce—of the skies—I see it—so clearly.... It will break down—all barriers.... A beautiful, happy world...."

His lips moved feebly at the last. I could not speak; could not even call him by name; I could only lean my head closer to hear.

One whispered word; then another: a fragment of poetry! I had heard him quote it often. But the whispered words were not for me. Paul was speaking to someone beside him—someone my blind, human eyes could not see....

I am writing these words at my desk in the great Transportation Building in New York. It stands upon the site of the Chrysler Building that towered here—until one of the flying torpedoes came over to hunt it out. They landed several in New York; how long ago it all seems that the threat of utter destruction hung over the whole nation—the whole world.

And now from my window I see the sparkling flash of ships. The air is filled with them; I am still unaccustomed to their speed. But a wisp of vapor from each bell-shaped stern throws them swiftly on their way; it marks the continuous explosion of that marvel of a new age—tritonite! There are tremendous terminals being built; the air-transport lines are being welded into efficient units that circle the world; and the world is becoming so small!

The barriers are gone; all nations are working as one to use wisely this strange new power for the work of this new world. No more poverty; no more of the want and desperate struggle that leads a whole people into the insane horrors of war; it is a glorious world of which we dream and which is coming slowly to be....

But I think we must dream well and work well to bring to actuality the beautiful visions in those far-seeing eyes of the man called Paul—Dictator, one time, of the whole world.

91 The Earthman's Burden by Roman Frederick Starzl

There is foul play on Mercury—until Denny Olear of the Interplanetary Flying Police gets after his man.

Aproximate word count: 6,000

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

Denny Olear was playing blackjack when the colonel's orderly found him. He hastily buttoned his tunic and in a few minutes, alert and very military, was standing at attention in the little office on the ground floor of the Denver I. F. P. barracks. His swanky blue uniform fitted without a wrinkle. His little round skullcap was perched at the regulation angle.

"Olear," said the colonel, "they're having a little trouble at the Blue River Station, Mercury."

"Trouble? Uh-huh," Olear said placidly.

The colonel looked him over. He saw a man past his first youth. Thirty-five, possibly forty. Olear was well-knit, sandy-haired, not over five feet six inches in height. His hair was close-cropped, his features phlegmatic, his eyes a light blue with thick, short, light-colored lashes, his teeth excellent. A scar, dead white on a brown cheekbone, was a reminder of an "encounter" with one of the numerous sauriens of Venus.

"I'm sending you," explained the colonel, "because you're more experienced, and not like some of these kids, always spoiling for a fight. There's something queer about this affair. Morones, factor of the Blue River post, reports that his assistant has disappeared. Vanished. Simply gone. But only three months ago the former factor—Morones was his assistant—disappeared. No hide nor hair of him. Morones reported to the company, the Mercurian Trading Concession, and they called me. Something, they think, is rotten."

"Yes, sir."

"I guess I needn't tell you," the colonel went on, "that you have to use tact. People don't seem to appreciate the Force. What with the lousy politicians begrudging every cent we get, and a bunch of suspicious foreign powers afraid we'll get too good—"

"Yeah, I know. Tact, that's my motto. No rough stuff." He saluted, turned on his heel.

"Just a minute!" The colonel had arisen. He was a fine, ascetic type of man. He held out his hand.

"Good-by, Olear. Watch yourself!"

When Olear had taken his matter-of-fact departure the colonel ran his fingers through his whitening hair. In the past several months he had sent five of his best men on dangerous missions—missions requiring tact, courage, and, so it seemed, very much luck. And only two of the five had come back. In those days the Interplanetary Flying Police did not enjoy the tremendous prestige it does now. The mere presence

of a member of the Force is enough, in these humdrum days of interplanetary law and order, to quell the most serious disturbance anywhere in the solar system. But it was not always thus. This astounding prestige had to be earned with blood and courage, in many a desperate and lonely battle; had to be snatched from the dripping jaws of death.

Olear checked over his flying ovoid, got his bearings from the port astronomer, set his coordinate navigator and shoved off. Two weeks later he plunged into the thick, misty atmosphere on the dark side of Mercury.

Ancient astronomers had long suspected that Mercury always presented the same side to the sun, though they were ignorant that the little planet had water and air. Its sunward side is a dreary, sterile, hot and hostile desert. Its dark side is warm and humid, and resembles to some extent the better known jungles and swamps of Venus. But it has a favored belt, some hundreds of miles wide, around its equator, where the enormous sun stays perpetually in one spot on the horizon. Sunward is the blinding glare of the

desert; on the dark side, enormous banks of lowering clouds. On the dark margin of this belt are the "ringstorms," violent thunderstorms that never cease. They are the source of the mighty rivers which irrigate the tropical habitable belt and plunge out, boiling, far into the desert.

Olear's little ship passed through the ringstorms, and he did not take over the controls until he recognized the familiar mark of the trading company, a blue comet on the aluminum roof of one of the larger buildings. Visibility was good that day, but despite the unusual clarity of the atmosphere there was a suggestion of the sinister about the lifeless scene—the vast, irresistible river, the riotously colored jungle roof. The vastness of nature dwarfed man's puny work. One horizon flashed incessantly with livid lightning, the other was one blinding blaze of the nearby sun. And almost lost below in the savage landscape was man's symbol of possession, a few metal sheds in a clear, fenced space of a few acres.

Olear cautiously checked speed, skimmed over the turbid surface of the great river, and set her down on

the ground within the compound. With his pencil-like ray-tube in his hand he stepped out of the hatchway.

A Mercurian native came out of the residence, presently, his hands together in the peace sign. For the benefit of Earthlubbers whose only knowledge of Mercury is derived from the televue screen, it should be explained that Mercurians are not human, even if they do slightly resemble us. They hatch from eggs, pass one life-phase as frog-like creatures in their rivers, and in the adult stage turn more human in appearance. But their skin remains green and fish-belly white. There is no hair on their warty heads. Their eyes have no lids, and have a peculiar dead, staring look when they sleep. And they carry a peculiar, fishy odor with them at all times.

This Mercurian looked at Olear seemingly without interest.

"Where is Morones?" the officer inquired.

"Morones?" the native piped, in English. "Inside. He busy."

"All right. I'm coming in."

"He busy."

"Yeah, move over."

Though the native was a good six inches taller than Olear he stepped aside when the officer pushed him. Men—and Mercurians—had a way of doing that when they looked into those colorless eyes. They were not as phlegmatic as the face. Morones was sitting in his office.

"Well, I'm here," Olear announced, helping himself to a chair.

"Yes"—sourly. "Who invited you?"

Olear looked at the factor levelly, appraising him. A big man, fat, but the fat well distributed. Saturnine face, dark hair, dark and bristly beard. The kind that thrived where other men became weak and fever-ridden. Also, to judge by his present appearance, an unpleasant companion and a nasty enemy.

"Don't see what difference it makes to you," Olear answered in his own good time; "but the company invited me."

"They would!" Morones growled. His eyes flickered to the door, and quick as a cat, Olear leaped to one side, his ray-pencil in his hand.

Morones had not moved, and in the door stood the native, motionless and without expression. Morones laughed nastily.

"Kind of jumpy, eh? What is it, Nargyll?"

Nargyll burst into a burbling succession of native phrases, which Olear had some difficulty following.

"Nargyll wants to move your ship into one of the sheds, but the activator key's gone."

"Yeah, I know," Olear assented casually. "I got it. Leave the ship till I get ready. Then I'll put it away. Get out, Nargyll."

The native, hesitated, then on the lift of Morones' eyebrows departed. Olear shifted a chair so that he could watch both Morones and the door. He reopened the conversation easily:

"Well, we understand each other. You don't want me here and I'm here. So what are you going to do about it?"

Morones flushed. He struggled to keep his temper down.

"What do you want to know?"

"What happened to the factor who was here before you?"

"I don't know. The translucene wasn't coming in like it should. Sammis went out into the jungle for a palaver with the chiefs to find out why. And he didn't come back."

"You didn't find out where he went?"

"I just told you," Morones said impatiently, "he went out to see the native chiefs."

"Alone?"

"Of course, alone. There were only two of us Earthmen here. Couldn't abandon this post to the wogglyes, could we? Not that it'd make much difference. Except for Nargyll, none'll come near."

"You never heard of him again?"

"No! Dammit, no! Say, didn't they have any dumber strappers around than you? I told you once—I tell you again—I never saw hide nor hair of him after that."

"Aw-right, aw-right!" Olear regarded Morones placidly. "And so you took the job of factor and radioed for an assistant, and when the assistant came he disappeared."

Morones grunted, "He went out to get acquainted with the country and didn't come back."

Olear masked his close scrutiny of the factor under his idle and expressionless gaze. He was not ready to jump to the conclusion that Morones' uneasiness sprang from a sense of guilt. Guilty or not, he had a right to feel uneasy. The man would be dense indeed if he did not realize he was in line for suspicion, and he did not look dense. Indeed, he was obviously a shrewd character.

"Let me see your 'lucene."

Morones rose. Despite his bulk he stepped nimbly. He had the nimbleness of a Saturnian bear, which is great, as some of the earlier explorers learned to their dismay.

"That's the first sensible question you've asked," Morones snorted. "Take a look at our 'lucene. Ha! Have a good look!"

He led the way across the compound, waved his hand before the door of a strongly built shed in a swift, definite combination, and the door opened, revealing the interior. He waved invitingly.

"You go first," Olear said.

With a sneer Morones stepped in. "You're safe, boy, you're safe."

Olear looked at the small pile on the floor in astonishment. Instead of the beautiful, semi-transparent chips of translucene, the dried sap of a Mercurian tree which is invaluable to the world as the source of an unfailing cancer cure, there were only a few dirty, dried up shavings, hardly worth shipping back to Earth for refining. The full significance of the affair began to dawn on the officer. The translucene trees grew only in this favored section of Mercury, and the Earth company had a monopoly of the entire supply. Justly, for only on Earth was cancer known, and it was on the increase. That small, almost useless pile on the floor connoted a terrible drug famine for the human race.

Morones' smile might have been a grin of satisfaction, at Olear's question:

"Is that all you've bought since the last freighter was

here?"

"It is," he replied. "The last load went off six months ago, and this here shed should be full to the eaves. There'll be hell to pay."

"It may not be tactful," Olear remarked, "but if you've got your takings cached away somewhere to hold up the Earth for a big ransom, you'd better come across right now. You can't get by with it, fellow. You should have close to six million dollars' worth of it, and you can't get away. You just can't."

Morones controlled his anger with an effort.

"Like any dumb strapper, you've got your mind made up, ain't you? Well, go ahead. Get something on me. Here I was almost set to give you a lead that might get you somewhere. And you come shooting off—trying to make out I stole the 'lucene and killed those two fellows, eh? Go ahead! Get something on me! But not on Company grounds. You're leaving now!"

With that he made a lunge at the officer, quite beside

himself with rage. Olear could have burnt him down, but he was far too experienced for such an amateurish trick. Instead he ducked to evade Morones' blow. But the big man was as agile as a panther. In mid-air, so it seemed, he changed his direction of attack. The big fist swept downward, striking Olear's head a glancing blow.

But the men of the Force have always been fighters, whatever their shortcomings as diplomats. Olear countered with a strong right to the body, thudding solidly, for Morones' softness did not go far below the surface. The factor whirled instantly, but not quite fast enough to bar the door. Olear was out and inside his ship in a few seconds, slamming the hatch.

"Tact!" he grinned to himself, inserting the activator key. "Tact is what a fella needs." The little space flier shot aloft, until the tiny figure of the factor stopped shaking its fist and entered the residence. The post had a flier of its own, of course, but Morones was too wise to use it in pursuit.

Olear considered what was best to do. Of course he

could have placed Morones under arrest; could still do it; but that would not solve the mystery of the two deaths and the missing 'lucene. If the choleric factor was really guilty of the crimes, it would be better to let him go his way in the hope that he would betray himself. Olear regretted that he had not kept his tongue under closer curb. But there was no use regretting. Perhaps, after all, he ought to turn back to pump Morones for some helpful information.

His mind made up, he descended again until he was hovering a few feet from the ground.

"Morones!" he called. "Morones!" He held the hatch open.

Morones came to the door of the residence. He had a tube in his hand, a long-range weapon.

"Morones," Olear declared pompously. "I place you under arrest!"

The effect was instantaneous. Morones lifted the tube, and a glimmering, iridescent beam sprang out.

The ship was up and away in a second, lurching and shivering uncomfortably every time the beam struck it in its upward flight. A good few seconds continued impingement....

But a miss is as good as a light-year. Miles high, Olear looked into his telens. Morones had laid aside his tube and was working with an instrument like a twin transit. Plotting the ship's course, naturally. Olear set his course for the Earth, and kept on it for a good twenty-four hours. Morones, if he was still watching him, would think he'd gone back for reinforcements. Such an assumption would be incredible now, but that was before the I. F. P. had achieved its present tremendous reputation.

Beyond observation range, Olear curved back toward Mercury again, and was almost inside its atmosphere when he made a discovery that caused him to lose for a moment his natural indifference, and to clamp his jaws in anger. The current oxygen tank became empty, and when he removed it from the rack and put in a new one he found someone had let out all of this essential gas. The valve of every one of the spare

tanks had been opened. Had Olear actually continued on his way to Earth he would have perished miserably of suffocation long before he could have returned to the Mercurian atmosphere. The officer whistled tunelessly through his teeth as he considered this fact.

The visibility was by this time normal; that is, so poor it would have been possible to land very close to the trading station. Olear was taking no chances, however, and came down a good three Earth miles away. The egg-shaped hull sank through the glossy, brilliant treetops, through twisted vines, and was buried in the dank gloom of the jungle. Here it might remain hidden for a hundred years.

The twilight of the jungle was almost darkness. Landmarks were not. But Olear made a few small, inconspicuous marks on trees with his knife until he came to an outcropping rock. He had noticed the scarlike white of it slashing through the jungle from the air, and used it as a guide to direct his stealthy return to the trading post. His belt chronometer told him it would be about time for Morones to get up

from his "night's" sleep. A little discreet observation might tell much.

Long before he reached the compound, Olear heard the rushing of the great Blue River in its headlong plunge to the corrosive heat of the desert. And then, through the mists, he glimpsed the white metal walls of the Company sheds.

He climbed a tree and for a long time watched patiently, lying prone on a limb. Blood-sucking insects tortured him, and flat tree-lice, resembling discs with legs, crawled over him inquisitively. Olear tolerated them with stoic indifference until at last his patience was rewarded. Morones was coming out of the compound. He was alone and obviously did not suspect that he was being watched, for he stepped out briskly. Once in the jungle he walked even faster, watching out warily for the panther-like carnivora that were the most dangerous to man on Mercury.

Olear shinned to the ground and followed cautiously. Morones had his ray-tube with him, as any traveler in these jungles did. Olear could and did draw fast, but a

dead trader would be valueless to him in his investigation, so he stalked him with every faculty strained to maintain complete silence. Often, in occasional clearings where the brown darkness grew less, he had to grovel on the slimy ground, picking up large bacteria that could be seen with the naked eye, and which left tiny, festering red marks on the skin. Mercury has no snakes.

The trader seemed to be heading for higher ground, for the path led ever upward, though not far from the tossing waters of the river. And then, suddenly, he disappeared.

Olear did not immediately hurry after him. A canny fugitive, catching sight of his pursuer, might suddenly drop to the ground and squirm to the side of the trail, there to wait and catch his pursuer as he passed. So Olear sidled into the all but impenetrable underbrush and slowly, with infinite caution, wormed his way along.

Presently he came to the little rise of ground where Morones had disappeared, but a painstaking search

did not reveal the factor. There were, however, a number of other trails that joined the very faint trail he had been following, and now there was a well-defined track which continued to lead upward. With a grimace of disgust Olear again plunged into the odorous underbrush and traveled parallel to the trail. It was well he did so, for several Mercurians passed swiftly, intent, so it seemed, in answering a shrill call that at times came faintly to the ear. They carried slender spears.

Several more Mercurians passed. The growth was thinning out, and Olear did not dare to proceed further. However, from his hiding place he could discern a number of irregular cave openings, apparently leading downward. They were apparently the entrances to one of the native cavern colonies, or possibly of a meeting place. No Earthman had ever entered one, but it was thought they had underground openings into the river.

As the cave openings were obviously natural, Olear conjectured that there might be others that were not used. After an anxious search he found one, narrow

and irregular, well hidden under the broad, glossy leaves of some uncatalogued vegetation. As it showed no evidence of use, Olear unhesitatingly slid down into it. It was very narrow and irregular, so that often he was barely able to squeeze through. The roots of trees choked the passage for a dozen feet or so, requiring the vigorous use of a knife. Bathed in sweat, his uniform a filthy mass of rags, Olear at last saw light.

The passage ended abruptly near the roof of a large natural cavern. Lights glistened on stalactites which cut off Olear's larger view, and voices came from below. By craning his neck the officer could look between the pendent icicles of rock and see a fire burning on a huge oblong block of stone. Figures were sitting on the floor around this block—hundreds of Mercurians. The leaping flames made their white and green faces and bodies look frog-like and less human than usual.

But the figure that dominated the whole assemblage, both by its own hugeness and the magnetic power that flowed from it, was not of Mercury but of Pluto.

For the benefit of those who have never seen a stuffed Plutonian in our museums—and they are very rare—let me refer you to the pious books still to be found in ancient library collections. The ancients personified their fears and hates in a being they called the Devil. The resemblance between the Devil of their imagination and a Plutonian is really astounding. Horns, hoofs, tail—almost to the smallest detail, the resemblance is there.

Philosophers have written books on the "coincidence" in appearance of the ancient Devil and the modern decadent Plutonians. The Plutonians were once numerous and far advanced in science, and no doubt they called on the Earth many times, in prehistoric days, and the so-called Devil was a true picture of those vicious invaders, who are somewhat less human than usually portrayed. What was once classed as superstition was therefore a true racial memory. Long before our ancestors came out of their caves to build houses, the Plutonians had mastered interplanetary travel—only to forget the secret until human ingenuity should reveal it once more.

The modern Plutonian in that dank cave was over ten feet tall, and it is easy to see why he dominated the assemblage. His black visage was set in an evil smile; his ebony body glistened in the firelight. He held a three-pronged spear in one hand, and sat on a pile of rocks, a sort of rough throne, so that he towered magnificently above all others.

He spoke the Mercurian language, although the liquid intonations came harshly from his sneering lips.

"Are ye assembled, frogfolk, that ye may hear the decision of your Thinking Ones?" he asked.

A respectful peeping chorus signified assent. But in that there was a hint of unrest; even of fear.

"Speak, ye Thinking One, your commands!"

"Hear me first!" An old Mercurian, unusually tall, faded and dry looking, his thick hide wrinkled like crushed leather, rose slowly to his feet and stepped before the oblong stone. His back was to the Plutonian, his face to the crescent of chiefs.

"The Old Wise One!" A twittering murmur went around the assemblage. "Hear the Old Wise One!"

"My people, I like this not!" began the ancient. "The Lords of the Green Star* have dealt with us fairly. Each phase* they have brought us the things we wanted"—he touched his spear and a few gaudy ornaments on his otherwise naked body—"in exchange for the worthless white sap of our trees. If we longer offend the Lords of the Green Star—"

(Footnotes:

In their various languages, almost all solar races call Earth "The Green Star." Although conditions on Mercury are unfavorable, Earth can be seen from the dark star, on mountain tops, during occasional dispersals of the cloud masses.

The Mercurians had no conception of time before the Earthmen came. A "phase" is the time between calls of the freight ships, and is therefore variable; but in those days it was about six or seven months.)

A raucous laugh interrupted the Mercurian's feeble voice, and it echoed eerily from the walls of the chamber.

"Valueless ye call the white sap?" sneered the Plutonian. "Hear me. That sap you call valueless is dearer than life itself to the Lords of the Green Star. For they are afflicted in great numbers with a stinking death they call cancer. It destroys their vitals, and nothing—nothing in this broad universe can help them save this white sap ye give them. In your hands ye have the power to bring the proud Lords of the Green Star to their knees. They would fill this chamber many times with their most priceless treasures for the sap ye give them so freely. Withhold the sap, and your Thinking Ones may go to the Green Star itself to rule over its Lords. They are desperate. Their emissaries may even now be on the way to beg your pleasure. Speak, Thinking Ones! Would ye not rule the Green Star?"

But the chiefs failed to become enthused. One of them rose and addressed the Plutonian:

"O Lord of the Outer Orbit! For near one full phase have ye dwelt among us. And well should ye know we have no desire for conquest. We fear to go to the Green Star to rule."

"Then let me rule for ye!" exclaimed the Plutonian instantly. "My brothers will abide with ye as your guests—shall see that ye receive a fair reward for the white sap; and I will convey your commands to the Lords of the Green Star."

The Old Wise One raised his withered hands, so that the uncertain twittering of voices which followed the Plutonian's suggestion subsided.

"My children," piped the feeble old voice, "the Black Lord has spoken cunning words, but they are false. It is plain to see that he desires to rule the Green Star, and our welfare does not concern him."

"If so it be that the white sap is of great value to the Lords of the Green Star, it is still of no value to us; and if the gifts they bring to us are of no value to them, they are dear to us."

The Plutonian sneered.

"Dearer than the Paste of Strange Dreams?"

A startled hush fell among the assembled Mercurians. They looked guiltily at one another, avoiding the eyes of the Old Wise One.

"What is this?" shrilled he, turning furiously to the Plutonian. "Have ye brought the paste of evil to our abode, knowing well the strict proscription of our tribe? Fool! Your death is upon ye!"

But the Plutonian only grinned and spread his glistening, black hands in a careless gesture. High overhead, peering through the stalactites, Olear instantly understood the Plutonian's strange power, the Paste of Strange Dreams, a fearsome narcotic of that far-swinging dark planet. More insidious and devastating than any drug ever produced on Earth, it had wrought frightful havoc among many solar races. The Earthmen had opened the lanes, broken the age-old barriers of distance, so that the harpies of evil could traffic their poison from planet to planet. So the

Paste of Strange Dreams was added to the Earthman's burden.

"Seize him—the Evil One!" shrieked the old chief, but the Mercurians sat sullen and silent, and the Plutonian sneered.

Finally one of the chiefs arose and with an effort faced the Old Wise One and said:

"The Strange Dreams are dearer to us than all else. Do as he says."

The piping voices rose in eager acclamation, but the Old Wise One held up his claws, waiting until silence returned.

"Wait! Wait! Before ye commit this folly, hear the Green Star man. Many times has he demanded audience. Let him come in."

"It is not permitted," demurred one of the chiefs.

"Ye permitted this being of evil to enter; let him enter

also."

"He is in the outer chambers now," one of the guards spoke. "His face is like the center of a ringstorm."

"Let him enter!"

Morones strode into the room angrily. Blinded by the fire after the darkness of the antechambers, he did not at first see the Plutonian. He strode up to the ancient chief and glared at him.

"Does the Old Wise One learn wisdom at last?" he rasped. The ancient shrank away from him, as did the nearer of the lesser chiefs.

"The Old Wise One thinks less of his wisdom," he replied wearily. "Behold!" He pointed to the enthroned Plutonian.

Morones started. His hand flashed to his side, and came away empty. Deft fingers had extracted his ray-tube. But he was a man of courage. Never could it be said to his shame that an Earthman cringed in the

sight of lesser races.

"So it's you, my sooty friend!" he snarled in English. The Plutonian, accomplished linguist, replied:

"As you see. You don't look very happy, Mr. Morones."

Morones regarded him impassively, his eyes frosty.

"That explains everything," he said at last with cold deliberation. "First Sammis, then Boyd. Going to finish me next, I suppose?"

The Plutonian twisted the end of an eyebrow and smiled.

"Interested in them?"

"What'd you do with the bodies?"

The Plutonian jerked his thumb carelessly. "The river you call the Blue is swift and deep. But before you follow them there is certain information I wish to get from you. Where is the soldier who came to visit

you?"

A crafty light came into Morones' face.

"He is not far from here, waiting for me."

Olear, in his cramped hiding place, could not help feeling a warm glow of admiration for Morones' nerve, because Morones thought him well on his way to Earth.

"Nargyll, what did your master do with the visitor?"

"Drove him back to the Green Star," Nargyll said promptly.

"And the oxygen tanks. Did you empty them?"

"I let them hiss." Nargyll's grin was sharkish.

"News to you, eh, Morones? Your officer's corpse has probably dropped into the sun by this time. Tell me, why did you drive him off?"

Morones sagged perceptibly. To gain a little time he

said truthfully:

"I knew I should be blamed and ruined for life. I didn't know you were here, damn you! I hoped to get this mess with the natives straightened up before he'd come back with reinforcements."

"Yes. Well, you owe some months of life already. Your presence here has been more or less embarrassing, but I had to let you live or I'd have had the whole I. F. P. here to investigate. Now that you've failed in keeping them from getting interested you may do me one more service." The black giant grinned.

"I've often wondered at the Earthman's prestige all over the solar system. Even to-night, soft and helpless as you are, these natives fear you. You will, therefore, be an object lesson in the helplessness of Earthmen."

Morones was pale but courageous. With contempt in every line of him he watched some of the less frightened chiefs, at the command of the Plutonian, push aside some of the blazing blocks of fungus on the stone, to make room for his body. At last he raised

his hand.

"Frogfolk!" he cried, "if ye do this thing, the Lords of the Green Star will come. They will come with fires hotter than the sun; they will blast your rivers with a power greater than the thunder of the ringstorms; they will fill your caves with a purple smoke that turns your bones to water—"

Shrill cries of fear almost drowned out his words. All the Mercurians had seen evidences of the dreadful power of the Earthmen. They began milling around, then stood rooted by the roar of the Plutonian's voice.

"Lies! Lies!" he bellowed. "See, they are weak as egglets!" He stepped down, picked Morones up by one shoulder, and held him, dangling, high over the heads of all. Morones clawed and tore at the brawny arm. He made a ludicrous picture. Soon the simple natives made a sniffing sound of mirth, and the Plutonian, satisfied at last, set him down again.

"He tells truth!" The Old Wise One had climbed to the top of the stone block. "The Lords of the Green Star

have their power not in their bodies, but it is great. It is greater far than the frogfolk. It is greater than the Lords of the Outer Orbit. They will come even as the surly one has said, and great shall be our sorrow. It is not yet too late. Release him, and deliver to him the white sap. Seize this evil one—"

The feeble, fickle minds were being swayed again. In a gust of impatience, the Plutonian stepped down, seized the aged chief's skinny body in his great black hands, and snapped him in two. There was a tearing of tough cords and tissue, and the two halves fell into the fire.

For an instant the Mercurians were stunned. Then some of them vented hissing sounds of rage, while others prostrated themselves on the floor. The black giant watched them narrowly for a moment, then turned his attention to Morones. He seized him by the arm and drew him slowly and irresistibly to him.

The murder of the Old Wise One had been done so quickly that Olear was unable to prevent it. Had he been able to use his ray weapon he could have burned

the Plutonian down, but it had been bent at one of the narrow turns of the crevice he had come down. The need for extreme lightness in weapons was rather overdone in those early times, and a little rough handling made them useless.

So now Olear, weaponless except for the service knife at his belt, began the hazardous undertaking of climbing among the stalactites to a position approximately above the Plutonian's head. The job required judgment. Some of the stone masses were insecurely anchored and would crash down at the lightest touch. Some were spaced so closely together that he could not get between them. Others were so far apart that it was difficult to get from one to another.

Yet he made it somehow, and unnoticed, for all eyes were turned on the tense drama being enacted below. From almost directly overhead he saw Morones being drawn upward.

"You saw," the Plutonian was saying triumphantly in Mercurian, "—you saw me unmake your Old Fool. And

now you will see that a Lord of the Green Star is even softer, even weaker—"

Morones, in that pitiless grasp, turned his face to the hateful grinning visage above him. In his last extremity he was still angry.

"You devil!" Morones shouted. "You may murder me, but they'll get you! They'll get you!"

"Who'll get me?" the Plutonian purred silkily, deferring the pleasure of the kill for another moment. Morones was having trouble with his breathing. His red face lolled from side to side, his eyes rolled in agony. Suddenly he saw Olear. Unbelieving, he relaxed.

"I'm seein' things!" he breathed.

"Who'll get me?" persisted the Plutonian, applying a little more pressure.

"The I. F. P.!" Morones gasped.

"Well, you little son-of-a-gun!" Olear thought, and then he jumped.



He landed a-straddle the neck of the Plutonian, which was almost like forking a horse. One brawny arm seized a horn. The other, with a lightning-swift dart, brought the point of the long service-knife to the pulsing black throat.

"Put him down!" Olear spoke into the great pointed

ear. "Easy!"

Back on his feet, Morones began bellowing at the Mercurians. Utterly demoralized, they fled pell-mell. Morones came back. He said:

"Nothing to tie him up with."

"That's all right," Olear replied, studiously keeping the knife point at exactly the right place, "I'll ride him in. Get going, you, and be tactful when you go through the door, or this sticker of mine might slip!" With extreme care the Plutonian did exactly as Olear ordered him to.

It was necessary to radio for one of the larger patrol ships to take Olear's enormous prisoner back to Earth for his trial. The officer testified, of course, and the Plutonian was duly sentenced to death for the murder of the old Mercurian. Execution by dehydration was decreed, so that the body would be uninjured for scientific study; and to-day it is considered one of the finest specimens extant.

In his testimony, however, Olear so minimized his own connection with the case that he received no public recognition. It was not until some months afterward, when Morones, on leave, rode back with a shipload of translucene, that the whole story came out, emphatically and profanely. Olear finally consented to speak a few words for the Telephoto News Co. As he stepped off the little platform deferential hands tried to push him back.

"You haven't told them who you are," protested the announcer. "Give your name and rank."

"Aw, they don't have to know that!" Olear rejoined, keeping on going. "They know it's one of the Force. That's all they have to know. Besides there's a blackjack game going on and I'm losing money every minute I'm out of it."

July 1931

92 The Doom from Planet 4 by Jack Williamson

A ray of fire, green, mysterious, stabs through the night to Dan on his ship. It leads him to an island of unearthly peril.

Aproximate word count: 8,100

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

"S O S. S O S. S O S." Three short, three long, three short, the flashes winked from the dark headland. Dan McNally, master and owner of the small and ancient trading schooner, *Virginia*, caught the feeble flickering light from the island as he strode across the fore-deck. He stopped, stared at the looming black line of land beneath the tropical stars. Again light flashed from a point of rock far above the dim white line of phosphorescent surf, spelling out the signal of distress.

"Somebody bane callin' with a flashlight, I t'ank," the big Swede, Larsen, rumbled from the wheel.

Dan thought suddenly of a reply. He rushed into the charthouse, to return in a moment with a lighted lantern and a copy of the Nautical Almanac which would serve to hide the flame between flashes. He flashed an answer.

Again the pale light flickered from the dark mass of land, spelling words out rather slowly, as if the sender were uncertain in his knowledge of Morse. Surprised as Dan had been by the signal from an island marked on the charts as uninhabited, he was astonished at the message that now came to him.

"You are in terrible danger," he read in the flashes.

"Dreadful thing here. Hurry away. Radio for warships. I am—"

The winking light suddenly went out. Dan strained his eyes to watch the point where it had been, and a few seconds later he saw a curious thing. A darting, stabbing lance of green fire flashed out across the

barren, rocky cliff, lighting it fleetingly with pale green radiance. It leapt out and was gone in an instant, leaving the shoulder of the island dark as before.

Dan watched for long minutes, but he saw nothing more brilliant than the pale gleam of phosphorescence where the waves dashed against the sheer granite wall of the island.

"What you t'ank?" Larsen broke in upon him.

Dan started, then answered slowly. "I don't know. First I thought there must be a lunatic at large. But that green light! I didn't like it."

He stared again at the looming mass of the island. Davis Island is one of the innumerable tiny islets that dot the South Pacific; merely the summit of a dead volcano, projecting above the sea. Nominally claimed by Great Britain, it is marked on the charts as uninhabited.

"Radio for warships, eh?" he muttered. A wireless

transmitter was one of many modern innovations that the Virginia did not boast. She had been gathering copra and shell among the islands long before such things came into common use, though Dan had invested his modest savings in her only a year before.

"What would anyone want with warships on Davis Island?" The name roused a vague memory. "Davis Island?" he repeated, staring in concentration at the black sea. "Of course!" It came to him suddenly. A newspaper article that he had read five years before, at about the time he had abandoned college in the middle of his junior year, to follow the call of adventure.

The account had dealt with an eclipse of the sun, visible only from certain points on the Pacific. One Dr. Hunter, under the auspices of a Western university, had sailed with his instruments and assistants to Davis Island, to study the solar corona during the few precious moments when the shadow covered the sun, and to observe the displacement of certain stars as a test of Einstein's theory of relativity.

The reporter had interviewed the party at San Francisco, on the eve of sailing. There had been photographs of the chartered vessel, of Dr. Hunter and his instruments, and of his daughter, Helen, who acted as his secretary. She looked not at all like a scientist, Dan recalled. In fact, her face had seemed rather pretty, even in the blurred newspaper half-tone.

But the memory cast no light upon the present puzzle. In the rambling years that had led him to this spot upon the old Virginia, he had lost touch with the science that had interested him during his college days. He had heard nothing of the results of the Hunter expedition. But this island had been its destination.

He turned decisively to the man at the wheel. "Larsen, we'll stand well offshore till daylight," he said. "Then, unless we see something unusual, we can sail in and land a boat to—"

The sentence was never finished. Through the corner of his eye, Dan saw a ray of green light darting

toward them from the island. A line of green fire seemed to reach out and strike him a physical blow. Green flame flared around him; and somehow he was hurled from the bridge, clear of the rail and into the sea.

His impression of the incident was very confused. He seemed to have struck the water with such force that his breath was knocked out. He struggled back to the surface, strangling, and coughing the bitter brine from his lungs. It was several minutes before he was comfortably treading water, and able to see what had happened.

The old schooner was then a hundred yards away, careening crazily, and drifting aimlessly before the light breeze. The strange green fire had vanished. Parts of the ship apparently had been carried away or disintegrated by the ray or the force of which it was a visible effect. The mainmast was down, and was hanging over the side in a tangle of rigging.

Bright yellow flames were dancing at a dozen points about the wreckage on the listing deck. A grotesque

broken thing, queerly illuminated by the growing fires, was hanging over the wheel—the body of Larsen. No living thing was visible; and Dan, after a second look at the wreck of the bow, knew that he must be the sole survivor of the catastrophe.

"Too bad about the boys," he muttered through teeth that chattered, for the cold water had already chilled him. "And poor old Larsen."

He thought again of the warning flashed from the shore. "Guess there must be something hellish afoot after all," he muttered again. "The flicker of green that stopped the signals, and the green fire that got us—what can they mean?" He looked toward the looming black shadow of the island, and began divesting himself of his clinging, sodden garments. "I don't wonder somebody wanted battleships. But even a battleship, if that green ray hit it—"

He drew a deep breath and ducked his head while he unlaced his shoes and kicked out of them. Then, with a final look at the burning wreck of the Virginia, he tore off the last bit of his underclothing and swam for

the shore in an easy crawl.

The rocky ramparts of Davis Island were three or four miles away. But there was no wind; the black sea was calm save for a long, hardly perceptible swell. A strong swimmer and in superb condition, Dan felt no anxiety about being able to make the distance. There was danger, however, that a shark would run across him, or that he could not find a landing place upon the rocky shore.

Four bells had rung when he had seen the first flash; it had been just ten o'clock. And it was some four hours later that Dan touched bottom and waded wearily up a bit of smooth hard beach, through palely glittering phosphorescent foam.

He rubbed the brine from his tired limbs, and sat down for a time, in a spot where a fallen boulder sheltered his naked body from the cool morning wind. In a few moments he rose, flexed his muscles and peered through the starlit darkness for a way up the cliff behind the beach. He found it impossible to distinguish anything.

"Got to keep moving, or find some clothes," he muttered. "And I may stumble onto what made the green light. Darn lucky I've been so far, anyhow. Larsen and the others—but I shan't think of them. Wonder who was flashing the signals from the island. And did the green fire get him?"

He turned to look out over the black plain of the sea. Far out, the Virginia lay low in the water, a pillar of yellow flame rising from her hull. As he watched, the flame flickered and vanished: the old schooner, he supposed, had sunk. Then he noticed a pale glow come into being among the stars on the eastern horizon.

"Hello," he muttered again. "So we're going to have a moon? In the last quarter, but still it ought to light me up from this beach."

A moment later the horns of the crescent had come above the black rim of the sea. Dan waited, swinging his arms and tramping up and down on the sand, until the silvery moon had cleared the horizon and illuminated the rugged face of the cliff with pale

white radiance.

He chose a path to the top of the cliff and clambered up, emerging in a jungle-like thicket of brush. Picking his way with the greatest caution, yet scratching his naked skin most painfully, he made his way for a few yards through the brush to a point of vantage from which he could look about.

He was, he perceived, in a narrow valley or ravine, with rugged black walls rising sheer on either side. The silvery light of the crescent moon fell upon the rank jungle that covered the narrow floor of the canyon, which rose and dwindled as it penetrated inland.

Gazing up the canyon, Dan gasped in amazement at what he saw.

Mars, the red planet, hung bright and motionless, low in the western sky, gleaming with deep bloody radiance. Directly beneath it, bathed in the white light of the moon, was a bare, rocky peak that seemed the highest point of the island. And upon that highest

pinnacle, that chanced to be just below the ruddy star, was an astounding machine.

Three slender towers, of a white metal that gleamed in the moonlight with the silvery luster of aluminum, rose from the rocky peak. They supported, in a horizontal position, an enormous metal ring. It must be, Dan reckoned swiftly, at least a hundred feet in diameter, and held a hundred feet above the summit of the mountain.

The huge ring gleamed with a strange purple radiance. A shimmering mist of red-violet light surrounded it. An unknown force seemed to throb within the mighty ring, drawing the mantle of purple haze about it.

And suspended inside the ring and below it was a long, slender needle of dazzling white light. To Dan, from where he stood in the canyon, it seemed a fine, sharp line, though he knew it must be some kind of pointer, luminous with the strange force pulsing through it.

The strange needle wavered a little, with quick, uncertain motions. The brilliance of its light varied oddly; it seemed to throb with a queer, irregular rhythm.

And the gleaming needle pointed straight at the planet Mars!

Dan stood a long time, watching the purple ring upon the silver towers, with the shining white needle hanging below it. He stared at Mars, glowing like a red and sinister eye above the incredible mechanism.

His mind was in a wild storm of wonder shot with fear. What was the meaning of the gleaming ring and needle? What connection did this great device have with the signal of distress from the cliff, and the green fire that had destroyed the *Virginia*? And why did the glowing needle point at Mars?

He did not know when he first began to hear the sound. For a time it was merely part of the strange mystery of the island, only another element in the atmosphere of fear and wonder that surrounded him.

Then it rose a little, and he became suddenly sharply conscious of it as an additional menace. The sound was not loud, but deep and vibrant. A whir or hum, like that of a powerful, muffled motor, but deeper than the sound of any motor man has ever made. It came down the gorge, from the direction of the machine on the mountain.

That deep, throbbing noise frightened Dan as none of his previous experiences had done. Shivering from fear as much as from cold, he crouched down beside a huge boulder in the edge of the tangle of brush that covered the bottom of the ravine. His heart pounded wildly. He was in the clutches of an unreasoning fear that some terrible Thing had seen him, and was about to seek him out. For a moment he had to use all his will to keep himself from panic flight through the brush. The unknown is always terrible, and he had invaded the domain of a force he could not understand.

In a moment, however, he recovered himself. He would be as safe there in the jungle, he thought, as anywhere on the island. He thought of starting a fire,

then realized that he had no matches, and that he would not dare to make a light if he were able. He pulled a few handfuls of dry grass to make a sort of bed, upon which he huddled up, thanking his lucky stars that the island was in semi-tropical latitudes.

His mind returned again to the riddles that confronted him: the green flash and the strange mechanism on the peak. He recalled fantastic stories he had read, of hermit scientists conducting amazing experiments in isolated parts of the world. Presently he decided that something of the kind must be on foot here.

"The green flash is a sort of a death ray," he summed up, aloud. "And they shoot it from that bright needle. No wonder they don't want to be bothered! Somebody may be fixing to upset civilization!

"But it's queer that the needle points at Mars...."

Of this last fact, which might have been a clue to the most reasonable solution of the mystery, if a rather astounding one, he was able to make nothing. In fact,

huddled up on his pile of grass in some degree of comfort, he presently went to sleep, still pondering in vain upon this last clue.

He was awakened by a soft, insistent purring sound, rather like that of a small electric motor run without load at very high speed. Recollection of the night's events came abruptly to him, and he sprang to his feet in alarm, finding his muscles sore and stiff from his cramped position.

From one side Dan heard the rumble of thunder, and, glancing up, saw that the sky above the sea was overcast with a rolling mass of dark, menacing clouds. There was a strange portentous blackness about these storm clouds that filled him with a nameless fear.

Suddenly he was struck with the thought that it was not thunder that had wakened him. The noise he had heard had not the rumbling or booming quality of thunder. As he stood there he again became conscious of the low, whirring sound, behind him. He whirled around to face it. The shock of what he saw left him

momentarily dizzy and trembling—though undoubtedly his surroundings had much to do with its effect upon him.

The sound came from a glistening metal machine which stood half-hidden in the brush a dozen yards away looking at him!

The thing was made of a lustrous, silvery metal, which Dan afterwards supposed to be aluminum, or some alloy of that metal. Its gleaming case was shaped more like a coffin, or an Egyptian mummy-case, than any other object with which he was familiar, though rather larger than either.

That is, it was an oblong metal box, tapering toward the ends, with the greatest width forward of the middle. Twin tubes projected from the end of it, lenses in them glistening like eyes. Just below them sprang out steely, glistening tentacles several feet long, writhing and twitching as if they were alive. The tangle of green brush hid the thing's legs, so that Dan could not see them.

Suddenly it sprang toward him, rising ten feet high and covering half the distance between them. It alighted easily upon the two long, jointed metal limbs upon which it had leapt, and continued to keep the lens-tubes turned toward Dan, so he knew that the grotesque metal thing was watching him.

The limbs, he observed, were similar to the hind legs of a grasshopper, both in shape and position. And evidently the thing leapt upon them in about the same way. Then he noticed another curious thing about it.

Three little bars of metal projected above the thickest part of its case, on the upper side. Their ends were joined by a little ring, three inches across. The tiny metal ring glowed with purple luminosity. A purple haze seemed to cling about it, as to the huge ring Dan had seen on the towers above the peak. And suspended inside this ring was a tiny metal needle, shimmering with pulsating white fire.

On the back of this metal monster was a miniature replica of the strange mechanism upon the pinnacle. The little needle pointed up the canyon. A glance that

way showed Dan that it pointed at the great device upon the mountain, which looked even more brilliant on this gloomy morning than in the uncertain radiance of the moon. The colossal ring was shrouded in a splendid mantle of purple flame; and the long, slender needle, which seemed to have swung on down to follow Mars below the horizon, still throbbed with scintillating white fire.

For several minutes the two stood there, studying each other. A naked man, tense and bewildered in the presence of mysterious forces—and a grotesque machine, cased in gleaming white metal, whose parts seemed to duplicate most of the functions of a living creature.

Then one of the writhing tentacles that shot from the "head" of the machine reached back under the metal case, and reappeared grasping what appeared to be a flat disk of emerald, two inches across and half an inch thick.

This green disk it held up, with a flat side toward Dan. There was no sound, but a flash of green light came

from it, cutting a wide swath into the jungle, and littering its path with smoking and flaming debris.

But Dan, expecting something of the kind, had flung himself sidewise into the shelter of the boulder beside which he had slept. Behind it, he gathered his feet under him, picked up a rock of convenient size for throwing, and waited, ready and alert.

He heard the soft humming sound on the other side of the boulder. A glittering object flashed above him. Crashing through the brush the metal monster came to earth on the same side of the boulder with him.

But the metal thing had not turned in its flight: consequently its rear end was toward Dan. As it began cumberously to turn about, he hurled his rock with an accuracy that came of a boyhood on the farm. Instinct had made him try for the little ring and needle on the back of the monster, apparently its most vulnerable part.

Whether by luck or skill, the rock struck the gleaming ring, crushing it against the needle—and instant

paralysis overtook the metal thing. Its tentacles and limbs became fixed and rigid, and it toppled over in the brush.

Dan walked over to it, and examined it briefly. The green disk had fallen on the ground, and he picked it up. It was made of emerald crystal, it had a little knob of glistening metal set in one side. Rather afraid of it, Dan forebore to twist the knob. But he still clutched it in his hand a few moments later, when, partly for fear that others of its kind would come to succor the fallen monster, and partly to secure shelter from the threatening rain, he retired into the shadows of the tangled jungle.

He spent perhaps half an hour in creeping back to what he supposed a place of comparative safety. For some time he lay there in the cool gloom, brushing occasional insects off his bare skin, wishing by turns that he had a cup of coffee and a good beefsteak, and that he could puzzle out a logical solution of all the astounding things he had met in the island. After the encounter with the metal monster, he felt his theory of the hermit scientists a bit inadequate.

Presently his attention was attracted by the unmistakable mew of a kitten. Then he heard the padding sound of cautious human footsteps, and a clear feminine voice calling "Kitty, kitty," in low tones. The steps and the voice seemed coming toward him; since there was no sound of crackling brush, he supposed there was a trail which he had not found.

"Hello," he ventured, when the voice seemed only a few yards away through the green tangle.

At the same instant a gray kitten appeared out of the underbrush, and frisked trustfully across to him. He put out a hand, caressed it, picked it up. In a moment the feminine voice replied, "Hello yourself. Who are you?"

A crackling sound came from the brush, as if the speaker were starting toward him. Dan, abruptly conscious of his lack of attire, said quickly, "Wait a minute! I haven't anything on, you see. I'm Dan McNally. I owned the schooner that something happened to off the island last night."

A delicious, trilling laugh greeted the panic of his first words. Then the clear, sweet voice, serious again, replied, "So you swam ashore from the boat I signaled?"

"Yes."

"Gee, but I'm glad to find you! And you say you haven't any clothes? I wonder what...." The voice paused reflectively, then resumed, "Here's a sheet that I got to signal with in the daytime, if I had a chance. You might wrap it around you until we find something better."

The low, liquid laugh rang out again; again there was a rustling in the brush, and presently an arm appeared, holding a rolled-up sheet.

"All right," he called. "Throw it this way."

In a moment, with the sheet draped around him like a Roman toga, and the kitten on his arm, he advanced to meet the owner of the beautiful voice.

At the trail he met a trim, active-looking young woman, clad in out-of-door attire and with a canvas knapsack on her back. Bareheaded, she wore her brown hair closely shingled. Her face, Dan recognized from the photograph he had seen five years before, though it was more lovely than the splotched newspaper picture had hinted. Her brown eyes were filled with laughter at his predicament and his present unusual garb.

He bowed with mock gravity and said, "How do you do, Miss Helen Hunter?"

Brown eyes widened in surprise. "You know me?" she asked.

"Not half so well as I hope to," he grinned.

Then, handing her the kitten, he spoke seriously. "What about this island? The green flashes? The big machine on the mountain? The metal thing that jumps about like a grasshopper? What's it all about? You know anything about it?"

"Yes, I know a good deal about it," she told him soberly. "It's rather a terrible story. And one you may not believe—no, you've seen them! But the kitten is hungry, and you must be, too, if you swam ashore."

"Well, yes, I am." Dan admitted.

The storm clouds were drifting out to sea; the sun was beginning to assert itself, and it now lighted up the scene with a cheerful brightness. She slung off her pack and sat down cross-legged at the side of the trail. Dan sat down opposite her as she opened the knapsack and produced a can of condensed milk, one of sardines, a can-opener, and half a loaf of bread.

"I had to select my supplies rather at random," she said, "and you'll have to make the best of them."

She started to open the sardines. "You'd better give it to me," Dan advised. "You might cut your hand."

"You think so?" she asked, deftly lifting the lid, fishing out a fish for the kitten, and presenting the can to Dan. Then with capable hands she broke off a large

chunk of bread, which she handed him.

"Go ahead and finish this up," she said. "I've already had breakfast." She punched two holes in the end of the milk can, and poured some of the thick yellow fluid into the palm of her left hand, from which she let the kitten lap it.

"And now for the mystery of the island," Dan demanded, forgetting bread and sardines in his eagerness.

The girl turned her face to him. "I'm Helen Hunter, as you seem to know," she began. "I came here with my father five years ago to observe an eclipse of the sun. When it was all over, and the ship called to take us off, he decided to send the results of our observations by one of the other men. He wanted to stay here to carry on another experiment—the one that led to that machine on the hill. Part of the other men were willing to stay. The yacht left us here, and has been back from San Francisco every six months since, with mail and supplies."

"And what was the experiment?" Dan demanded eagerly.

"Have you ever looked at Mars through a good telescope?" she countered. "Then you must have seen the canals—straight dark lines running from the white polar caps to the equatorial zone. All scientists did not agree as to what they were, but nobody could suggest a natural origin for them.

"My father was one of those who thought that the canals were fertile, cultivated strips, irrigated with water brought down from the melting ice-caps. Irrigation systems meant intelligent life upon the planet, and his experiment was an attempt to communicate with that intelligence."

"And he succeeded?" Dan was astounded.

"Yes. The means was simple enough: other men had suggested it years before, in fact. Any fairly bright light on Mars—such as the beam of a searchlight directed toward earth—would be visible in a good telescope, when the planet is favorably situated: it

follows that such a light on earth should be visible to an observer with a similar instrument on Mars.

"It was possible, of course, but unlikely, that Mars would have intelligent inhabitants still ignorant of the telescope. It was also possible that their senses would be different from ours—that, if they saw at all, it would be with a different part of the spectrum. Father took the chance. And he succeeded.

"The call was simple: merely three flashes of light, repeated again and again. We used a portable searchlight, mounted on a motor-truck, such as is used in the army. The three flashes meant that we were on the third planet of the solar system. The answering call, from the fourth planet, should be four flashes, of course.

"For three nights we kept signaling. One of the men watched the motor-generator, and I operated the searchlight, swinging it on Mars and off again, to make the flashes. Dad kept his eye screwed to the telescope. Nothing happened and he got discouraged. I persuaded him to keep on for another night, in case

they hadn't seen us at first; or needed more time to get their searchlight ready.

"And on the fourth night poor Dad came out of the observatory, shouting that he had seen four flashes."

Dan gasped, speechless with astonishment. "Then that machine, with the needle pointing at Mars, and the green flashes, and the thing that jumped at me—"

Helen waved a white hand for silence. "Just keep cool a minute! I'm coming to them.

"The four flashes just began it. In a few days Dad and the Martians were communicating by a sort of television process. He would mark off a sheet of paper into squares, blacken some of the squares to make a picture or design, then have me send a flash for each black square, and miss an interval for each white one, taking them in regular order. The Martians seemed to catch on pretty soon; in a few days Dad was receiving pictures of the same sort.

"Rather a slow way of communication, perhaps. But it

worked better than one might think at first. In a month Dad had received instructions for building a small machine like that big one on the hill. It is something like radio—at least it operates with vibrations in the ether—but it's as much ahead of our radio as an airplane is in advance of a fire-balloon. I understand a good bit about it, but I won't try to explain it now.

"And in the next three years Dad learned no end of things from the people on Mars. One queer thing about it was, that they never let us see them on the television apparatus, no matter how many of their scientific secrets they gave us. Dad and I exhibited ourselves, but I don't know yet what the Martians look like—though I have made a guess.

"By the end of the third year they had showed Dad how to make one of those metal things—"

"Like that one that jumped at me?" Dan broke in with a shudder.

"Yes. They seem almost alive; but they are machines,

like our robots, and controlled by the radio apparatus. The eyes use photo-electric cells, and relay what is before them to the Master Intelligence." The girl spoke these last words in a low tone, shrinking involuntarily. She paused a moment, then shrugged and continued.

"The first machine did not obey my father. It was controlled by signals that came from Mars, over the big station on the hill. And it went to work, making more apparatus, building more machines, enlarging the receiving station. It worked in obedience to the Master Intelligence on Mars!

"That was a year ago. The last time the yacht called, my father and the other men still hoped to control the machines. They let her go back without us. The machines tolerated us a while; paid no attention to us; they were busy working mines and building huge, strange things that must be flying machines; the plateau on the other side of the peak is crowded with them.

"For the machines are preparing to leave the island!

They are going to conquer the world for the Master Intelligence on Mars!

"Months ago my father discovered this, and realized that he had loosed doom upon the earth. He and the three other men planned to destroy that big station on the peak. All the signals to the machines are relayed through that, from Mars. The machines seemed to pay no heed as they made their preparations.

"Then one night, about three weeks ago, they tried to dynamite the station." The girl's shoulder trembled; she paused to brush a tear from her eye, then went on hastily, in a voice grown husky with emotion. Dan felt an odd desire to take her slight form in his arms and comfort her in her grief.

"The machines had seemed heedless, but they were ready. They had those disks that throw the green fire: we had not seen them before. And—well, all four of them were killed."

Dan handed her the disk of green crystal he had

taken from the thing that had attacked him. She examined it silently, then went on.

"Dad had left me in bed, but I heard an explosion. I think the bombs went off when the green fire struck them. I knew what had happened, and got out of the house just before the machines arrived. They wrecked the place with their green flashes.

"And for the last three weeks I've been hiding in the jungle, or watching for ships. Three times I've raided the ruins of the house for something to eat: fortunately it didn't burn, like your ship. And that's all, I suppose—except I'm awfully glad that you got ashore."

"Thanks," Dan said, earnestly. "And what are we going to do now?"

"I don't know," Helen answered in a troubled tone.

"I'm afraid. Afraid for all humanity. On the television, I've seen enough of Mars to be sure that it is a world of machines, controlled by one Master Intelligence. And even that may be a machine. We make machines

that compute the tides and carry out other computations that are almost beyond the power of the human mind: why couldn't a machine think?

"The Master Intelligence of Mars plans to add the Earth to his domain. Unless we can do something to stop it, in a few years the world will be overrun with gigantic robot-machines, controlled by force from across the gulf of space. Humanity cannot resist them. Imagine a battleship pitted against that green annihilating ray, and all the other science of an elder planet!

"Life is to be blotted out! The Master Intelligence of Mars will rule two worlds of mechanical monsters!"

Dan sat in a dazed vision of horror to come, until Helen straightened up as if shaking off a mantle of fear, and smiled heroically, if a bit wanly.

"Now you must eat your bread and sardines, to give you strength to fight for humanity!" she cried, with a laugh that she strived, not too successfully, to make cheerful and gay.

Obediently, he began to eat, finding an excellent appetite....

It was several minutes later that he fancied he heard a whirring and crackling in the brush behind them. He sprang to his feet in alarm.

"It can't be far back to where I left the machine," he cried. "Do you suppose there's danger that—"

The mechanical ears of the metal things may have picked up the sound of his voice: but in any event, green flame flashed about them on the instant. Feeling a sudden protective impulse, Dan started toward Helen. That was his last recollection, before what seemed a terrific concussion swept him into the abyss of unconsciousness....

His first thought, when he awakened, was of the girl. But he was alone in the silence of the canyon. He sat up, realizing that many hours had passed, for the air was growing cool again, and the sun was low behind the peak at the head of the ravine. The huge, mysterious machine of the purple ring and the

vibrating white needle were blazing splendidly.

He took more detailed stock of his immediate surroundings. The tangle of brush that had sheltered them had been cut away by the green annihilating ray. Charred stumps remained to show where it had fired bushes beyond the trail. His own shoulder was blistered, a hole was burned in the sheet wound about him, and the hair was singed from the back of his head.

Suddenly trembling with horror, he looked about for anything to show that Helen had perished by the ray. Discovering nothing, he breathed a sigh of relief.

"She must be still alive, anyhow," he muttered. "And I've had another lucky break! The ray was too high to get me. They must have left me for dead."

Presently he became conscious of torturing thirst. He retired through the brush, along the rocky wall of the canyon. By sunset he came upon a little natural basin in a rock, half full of rain water. It was none too clean, but he drank his fill of it, and felt relief.

Looking up the canyon, he could see the great mechanism on the peak, gleaming in the dusk. Intensely-glowing purple mist clung about the great metal ring, and the slender, delicate needle swung below it, still vibrating, still throbbing with brilliant, white radiance. It pointed at the red eye of Mars, which had just winked into view.

Dan stared at it a long time.

"It all sounds crazy," he muttered, "but it isn't! The Master Intelligence of Mars, she said, is controlling the mechanical things through that! The doom of the Earth is coming through that white needle! If only I could smash it, somehow!"

He looked down at the white folds of the sheet that draped him, and clenched his hands impotently. "No gun! Not even a pocket-knife. Nothing but my bare hands!" He bit his lip.

Still he stared challengingly at the gleaming mechanism on the peak. An idea slowly took form in his mind; an exclamation abruptly escaped him.

Narrowly he eyed the trussed girders of the silver towers which supported the great ring, muttering to himself.

"Yes, I can do it! If I don't get caught! I can climb it, well enough. The needle looks a bit frail. I should be able to smash it! I'd like to see Helen again, though."

He gathered the sheet around him, and began picking a cautious way up the canyon, staying always in the cover of boulders or brush. A few times he disturbed a rock, or snapped a twig beneath his foot. Then he waited out of sight for long minutes, though he had no reason to believe that the metal monsters were on the alert for him.

"I've got to do it! The world depends on it!" he kept saying again and again in his mind.

The quick darkness of the tropics had fallen almost before he started. But he welcomed the night, for, if it made his own silent progress more difficult, it reduced the hazard that he would be discovered.

Gauging the time by the slow wheeling of the diamond-like stars across the velvet sky, he thought that two hours had passed when he reached the head of the canyon. He stood up cautiously to survey the little plateau at the summit of the hill.

It was several acres in extent, quite level, and almost clear of vegetation. At the farther side was a pile of wreckage, which, he supposed, had been the quarters of Dr. Hunter's party, before they had been destroyed.

Many huge machines stood about the plateau, vast, dark masses looming in the starlight. Mostly they were either not running or very silent in operation; but a very deep, vibrant humming sound came from one near him. Smaller shapes were moving about them, with long easy leaps. These, he knew, were the mechanical monsters, though it was too dark to distinguish them.

But by far the most prominent object upon the plateau was the enormous gleaming thing that Helen had said was the station over which came the signals from the Master Intelligence on Mars. One of its three

towers sprang up not far from where he stood. The huge, refulgent ring, swathed in its mist of purple fire, was a full hundred feet above him; and the slender needle, pulsing with white flame, swinging within and below the colossal ring, was itself a hundred feet in length.

The white needle, for all its length, seemed hardly thicker than a man's finger. It was mounted at the top of a curiously complex and delicate-looking device that spread broadly out between the three towers, below the center of the huge purple ring.

Dan looked at it and decided that his plan had at least a chance of success—though he had no hope that it would not be fatal to him.

Quickly and silently he ran to the base of the mighty silver towers nearest him and began to climb the side toward the ravine, where the maze of girders would hide him, at least partially, from any watchers back on the plateau. The starlight and the faint weird radiance of the purple ring above sufficed to guide him.

The cross-braces on the girder he had chosen were spaced closely enough to serve as the rungs of a ladder. Dan climbed easily, pausing twice for breath, and to look down at the dark plateau. The vast, humming machines loomed up strangely in the pale purple light that fell from the gleaming ring.

Once he looked across toward the other side of the island. The surface there was more level. He glimpsed tiny moving lights, and huge stationary masses, apparently as large as ocean liners. He had an impression of a vast amount of mechanical activity, proceeding in the darkness very rapidly, and in a silent and orderly fashion.

"The expeditionary force of the Master Intelligence of Mars," he thought, "preparing to set out against humanity! And what I can do is the only chance to stop it!"

He climbed again with renewed energy. A few yards more brought him to the colossal metal ring. Resting upon the three towers, it was a circular band of shining metal a foot thick and as wide as a road. The

intense purple glow extended several feet from its surface.

Dan touched it tentatively. He felt a tingling electric shock. And he thought he could feel a radiation coming from it, giving him a curious sensation of cold. As he reached his hands up and grasped the upper edge of the great ring, he felt what seemed a physical current of cold.

Controlling his tendency to shiver, he climbed upon the last brace, and, lifting his weight with his hands, threw himself face down upon the flat upper surface of the vast ring. He lay bathed in cold purple fire. He tingled with the chill of it. A frozen current seemed to penetrate his body. Involuntarily he trembled, lost his grip and dangled precariously from the rim.

Only a frantic scrambling restored his hold. Then, fighting the sensation of freezing cold that came from the mist of purple flame, he drew himself forward and got to his feet upon the broad surface of the metal ring. On both sides it curved away like a circular track. Red-violet fire shimmered about it, bathing him

to the waist in a chilling torrent.

Through coruscating frozen flame he waded to the inner rim of the colossal ring. Below him hung the needle, a mere straight line of white fire, a hundred feet in length. Eye-dazzling radiance scintillated along it, waxing and waning with a curious throbbing rhythm. The needle vibrated a little, but it pointed directly at the red point of Mars, now almost directly overhead.

Repressing a shudder, Dan looked down at the complex and delicate apparatus upon which the slender needle was mounted. It was a light frame of white metal bars, with spidery coils and huge glowing tubes and flimsy spinning disks mounted in it. The gleaming needle was mounted much like a telescope at the top of the device, fully fifty feet below him.

"Looks flimsy enough," Dan muttered. "I'll go through it like a sixteen-inch shell! Who would have thought I'd end this way!"

He stepped back for a moment, and stood on the

polished metal, hidden to the waist in cold purple flame. Lest it impede his movements, he tore the sheet from him and threw it aside. He let his eyes sweep for a last time over the familiar constellations blazing so splendidly in the black sky above. He had a pang of heartache, as if the stars were old friends. His glance roved fondly over the dark, indistinct masses of the island, and across the black plain of the sea.

"Well, no good in waiting," he muttered again. "Sorry I can't see Helen. Hope she gets off all right."

He backed to the outer rim and drew a deep breath, like one about to dive. Then, with set face, he sprinted forward. As he did so a blinding flash of green light flickered up before him. He ducked his head and leapt from the inner edge of the vast glowing ring.

For long seconds, it seemed, he was plunging down through space, feet first. Air rushed screaming about his ears. But his mind was quite calm, and registered an astonishingly large series of impressions.

He saw the delicate, gleaming machine rushing up to

meet him, the shimmering white needle swung on its top.

He took in the silent, dark plateau, with the masses of the great machines rising like ominous shadows here and there, and the mechanical monsters leaping busily about it, almost invisible in the dim, ghostly radiance that fell from the purple ring.

He saw a vivid flame of green reach up past him from somewhere below. He knew, without emotion or alarm, that he had been discovered, and that it was too late for his discoverers to stop him.

He found time, even, for a fleeting thought of death. His mind framed the question, "What will I be in a moment from now?"

Then he had struck the great white needle, and was crashing into the delicate apparatus below it. Waves of pain beat upon his mind like flashes of blinding light. But his last mental image, as he passed into oblivion, was a picture of Helen's face. Oddly, it was not her face as he had last seen it, but a reproduction

of the old newspaper half-tone, curiously retouched with life and color.

There is little more to tell. It was some weeks later when Dan came back out of a world of delirium and dreams, to find himself lying on his back in a tent, very much bandaged. He was alone at the moment, and at first could not recall that tremendous last day of his conscious life.

Then he heard a thrillingly familiar feminine voice calling "Kitty, kitty, kitty." He tried to move, a dull pain throbbed in his breast, and a groan escaped him. In a moment Helen appeared; the gray kitten was forgotten. She looked very anxious and solicitous—and also, Dan thought, very beautiful.

"No, no!" she cried. "You are going to be all right! Dad made me learn a little elementary medicine before we came here, and I know. But you mustn't speak! Not for days yet! I'll have to guess what you want. And you can wink when I guess the right thing.

"Gee, but I'm glad you've come to! You'll be as well as

ever, pretty soon. The kitten was lots of comfort. Still —"

Dan attempted to move. She leaned over him, shifted his weight and smoothed the sheet with strong, capable hinds. "You want to know about what happened to the machine monsters?"

He winked.

"Well, you remember when they found us, and shot the green ray at us. They left you there—I thought you were dead—and carried me up here on the hill. Perhaps they wanted me for a laboratory subject to test the green ray on, or something of the kind. Anyhow, they carried me into a big shed filled with strange machines.

"They kept me there until that night. Then, all of a sudden, they all—stopped! They froze! They were dead!

"The tentacles of the one that was holding me were set about me. But I worked free, and got out of the

shed. It took all night. And when I came out, just at sunrise, I saw that the purple fire was gone from the great ring. The needle was knocked down, and the apparatus smashed.

"I found you there in the wreckage. You made a human bullet of yourself to smash it! The greatest thing a man ever did!"

Though normally rather modest, Dan felt a glow of pride at the honest admiration ringing in her clear voice, and shining from her warm brown eyes.

"So I gathered up what was left of you," she went on, "and tried to put you back together again. A good many bones were broken, and you had more cuts and bruises than I could mention; but the apparatus had broken the force of the fall, and you were still alive. You are remarkably well put together, I should say; and unusually lucky, as well!

"And, well, the machines and apparatus are scattered about all over the island. Every one of them stopped the instant you smashed the connection with the

directing intelligence on Mars. There'll be quite a stir in the scientific world, I imagine, in about three weeks, when the yacht comes and carries us back with a lot of plans and specimens. We must send about a thousand engineers back here to study what we leave behind us.

"And do you want anything else?" She bent over and watched his bandaged face. Looking up into her bright eyes, thrilling to the cool, comforting pressure of her hand on his forehead, Dan reflected. Then he winked.

"Something you want me to do?"

He winked.

"When? Right now?"

No response.

"After the yacht comes."

He winked.

"What is it?" She looked him in the eye, blushed a little, and laughed.

"You mean—"

Dan winked.

93 The Hands of Aten by Desmond Winter Hall

Out of solid ice Craig hews three long-frozen Egyptians—and is at once caught up into amazing adventure.

Aproximate word count: 14,400

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

The sleek black monoplane came scudding out of the south, flying low over fields of ice and snow that were thawing slowly under the heat of the arctic sun. After a long time it wheeled, circled gradually, and then, as if it had found what it had been looking for, came lightly down and skidded to a graceful halt in a low flat area between some round-topped hillocks. A fur-clad figure emerged from the enclosed cockpit and climbed a low ridge into the wan sunlight above.

For a while the man looked around, getting his

bearings. Miles on every side stretched the great rough plains of ice—ice that became a broad path of glittering diamonds where it led toward the low-hung sun, far in the south. Perhaps a quarter mile in that direction lay the white rise of a hill much larger than its fellows, probably, the man thought, a volcano. Towards it he laboriously made his way. His tiny figure was only a speck on the far-flung, deserted landscape—a human mite, puny and futile against the giant, hostile white waste.

The sky was clear and cloudless, the sun unusually warm. So warm, indeed, that long clefts, caused by the unequal expansion of the ice, appeared here and there. The man from the plane had not gone more than fifty yards when he halted sharply. With a crack like thunder, a cleft had opened at his very feet—a rift ten feet deep in places, apparently bottomless in others, and very long. Not wanting to go around it, he slid down one side and, with an ice pick, started to hack a foothold in the opposite bank.

It was then that the man saw the thing—something sticking from the ice just above his head. As he stared

at it, amazement appeared on his bronzed face. He looked around bewilderedly, then peered still more closely into the bluish depths of the crystal wall.

The head of a spear was jutting from the ice. And the spear was held by a man entrapped within the wall.

The details of the ice-held figure were but slightly blurred, for it was only a few feet from the surface. It was that of a man, and it was plain that he was not an Eskimo. He was locked in a distorted position, as if caught unawares by a terrific weight of sliding snow. And he had been caught, seemingly, when in the act of hurling his weapon.

For a long time the man from the plane peered at his discovery. Then his blue eyes followed slowly the direction in which the spear was pointing, and he gasped, and took a few quick steps further down the cleft. There, in the opposite wall, were two more bodies.

These, though, were of man and woman. They were even closer to the surface of the ice. Crouched over,

the man's left hand was craned as if to protect his companion from some peril—from the cataclysm that had trapped them, it might have been. Or perhaps from the spear of the other.

The fur-muffled figure stood motionless, gazing at them. His ice pick was held limply, his eyes were wide. Then, suddenly, the pick was grasped firmly, and flakes of ice flew under its level blows as he started to carve his find from their frozen tomb.

The man was trembling with wild excitement when at last the stiff form of the woman was extricated. She was not so much a woman as a girl, really—and she was beautiful. But the man from the plane evidently didn't care so much about that; nor even her almost miraculous state of preservation. He rubbed away some of the coating of ice from her face, and stared most intently at her forehead. Then he stood upright, and said, simply:

"Well, I'll be damned!"

If Wesley Craig had been merely what he was listed

as on the roster of the Somers Arctic Expedition of 1933—that is, a geologist—he would not have been so astounded. But his life work, really, was archaeology. He had spent years delving in the ruins of ancient temples, especially, those of old Egypt. He knew the ancient language as well as anyone knew it, and was familiar with every known detail of the civilization of the Pharaohs. And, being so, he was now properly confused. For every bit of his knowledge told him that this girl, whom he had found in the wastes of the arctic, was of Egyptian stock.

A certain tiny hieroglyph traced on her smooth forehead—the intricate band around her fine hair—the very cut of the frozen robe she wore—Egyptian—every one of them!

Yet, stubbornly, Wesley Craig wouldn't admit it. Not until he had cut the two men from the ice and hauled all three laboriously up the side of the cleft and stretched them out on the level ice, did he have to. He couldn't deny it, then. In some mysterious way, Egypt was connected with the three rigid bodies.

For the two men were garbed as warriors, and their helmets and harness and sword-sheaths were indisputably of Egyptian design.

There, however, the similarity between the two ended. The one with the spear was big-muscled and burly; the other much slighter of build. This latter, Craig guessed, had been fleeing with the girl when icy death had overwhelmed them.

But he did not then try to go into that, the story that some sudden cataclysm had cut short. His fervor, as an Egyptologist, was afire. He was burning with eagerness to get these bodies back to the main base of the Somers Expedition, some three hundred miles south. Into the learned circles of Egyptology, of archaeology, they'd throw a bomb-shell that would make nitroglycerine seem like weak tea.

Craig couldn't taxi his plane closer; he would have to carry them to it; and to do this he began to carefully massage all the larger pieces of ice from the girl's limbs and clothing, to make her lighter. At the Somers base they could all be re-frozen, to maintain their

perfect preservation.

It was while he was diligently rubbing that he fully realized the girl's beauty. Delicate, cleanly cut features; fine, large eyelids; tiny, slender hands. Save for her icy pallor, she might almost have been merely asleep as she lay on the snow.

Wes Craig finished massaging the girl and then went on and did the same for the two warriors. For an hour he carefully and reverently released them from the reluctant fingers of their icy death, and he was a little tired from his exertions and his great excitement when at last he finished and stood erect, resting. But he did not stand quiet for long. A sudden gleam lit his eyes: a mad idea had come to him.

"Won't hurt to try!" he muttered excitedly, and the next moment his lithe figure was running over the slippery ice bank to his airplane, out of sight behind the nearby hillocks.

Wes Craig worked from a sub-base on his sole expeditions to chart the various mountains and

ranges in the islands off north-east King Charles Land, within the Arctic Circle. He had only one partner, a mechanic, who stayed behind on his shorter trips. And therefore all manner of emergency devices were stowed in the cockpit of his plane: a tiny folding tent, an amazingly light sled, a large store of compressed food—and a large vial of Kundrenaline and a hypodermic needle.

Kundrenaline was still somewhat of an unknown quantity in 1933. Kund, the German, had developed it but a year before. The fluid was already standard beside the operating tables of the world's most modern hospitals, so valuable had its qualities proven to be. It had actually restored life after hours of death. A complex mixture of concentrated adrenaline and highly compressed liquid food, it gave a tremendous stimulation to the heart, at the same time providing the body with energy food to withstand the shock.

It was meant for emergency use on the Somers Expedition. But Wes Craig wasn't going to use it for that. He was going to use it for an experiment—a

crazy experiment, he told himself. Fish—many forms of life—withstand freezing in solid ice without hurt. Human beings—? It wouldn't hurt to try, anyway, his mind kept repeating.

Fifteen minutes saw him back beside the rigid bodies, and kneeling over the girl. The sun had warmed her body somewhat, and the glistening rheum of frost had melted from all three. Hardly breathing from his suspense, Wes filled the needle's chamber full and plunged it into the firm white flesh just above the girl's silent heart.

A short laugh came from him—an ironic laugh. It seemed idiotic to even think of restoring her to life, even if she had been dead only a week or so. It was quite—

And then his thoughts stopped.

"My God!" he said suddenly.

For a tide of faintest color had surged through the girl's wan cheeks. And her slim figure had stirred

perceptibly on the sheet of ice!

"By heaven, she's coming to!" Craig muttered unbelievably.

Pressing his ear to her chest, he detected a faint and labored beating of her heart, stirring from its cold sleep as the terrific stimulation jolted it back to life. The girl's eyelids flickered; a tiny sigh escaped her full lips. Craig took off his heavy parka and laid it over her. Trembling with tremendous excitement, he tore himself away from the miracle of re-created life, and strode to the body of the young man who was apparently her partner.

Again he administered the Kundrenaline. Then he went to his first discovery—the heavily built, powerful warrior whose spear had stuck out of the ice. The hypodermic was once more filled, and the fluid plunged into his body. Even as a faint moan came from the younger man, the warrior's heart started to beat.

Perspiring, breathing quickly, vial and needle still in

his hands, Wes stood off and surveyed the three.

The girl's hands were moving fitfully; strange, racking gasps came from her throat. The other two were similarly affected. Almost frightened, held motionless by the weirdness of it, the American watched.

The heavily built warrior was tossing in a series of convulsions. His legs kicked out spasmodically, arms jerked and clenched, and the helmeted head rolled from side to side. Then the man lay still for as long as a minute; but, just as Craig was about to go to him, his legs tensed once again, and, staggering drunkenly, he got to his feet.

He looked around wildly, but did not see the dumbfounded Craig, for his eyes fell on the figure of the younger man. He too had risen, swaying on weak legs. And the girl was sitting up and staring at the two of them.

And then, grotesquely, preluded by a cry from the woman, the tragedy which death had once cut short was enacted out, there on the rough sheet of ice and

snow.

The man with the spear fixed his eyes on the girl's young partner, raised his weapon, leveled it unsteadily, and tossed it weakly forward. The pointed end clipped its target and sent him reeling, with a thin trickle of slow blood running from his right shoulder. The girl staggered to her feet and ran between the two. But the big warrior's hand swept her aside, and a short sword leaped from its sheath at his waist.

Wes was stupidly staring, unable to move. The combatants were utterly unconscious of him. The younger one, painfully wounded, drew his own sword and swayed forward to meet his enemy.

The fight was grotesque. Both were weak, unsteady. The short swords stabbed slowly, missing by yards in their drunken course. Hatred was on the big man's dark face, and a fierce lust for blood. It was only when the weapons clashed loudly together that Craig came out of his daze.

"Stop!" he yelled, jumping forward. "Wait! Stop!"

All three turned and looked full at him. And then death, which had been banished for but a few minutes, swooped swiftly once more on the young man. While he stood peering, bewildered, at Craig, the huge warrior steadied his blade and drove it home through his unguarded chest. The man slid over the edge of the ice into the cleft below.

The girl shrieked again and went down to his fallen figure, while the victor waved his bloody sword aloft with a shout of triumph. Then, without hesitation, he leaped at the American.

Wes was taken wholly by surprise. He dropped the vial of Kundrenaline and the hypodermic, and he heard them crash and break at his feet as he fumbled for his automatic, in a holster at his belt. But the warrior was upon him. His crimsoned blade swung high, gleamed downward, and smote Wesley Craig square on the side of the head.

Lucky for him, the flat of the sword had been used—

but it was enough. The American reeled under the terrific swipe. He had a last glimpse of two inflamed eyes, of a savage, contorted face; then the universal whiteness went black, and he fell, and the whole incredible scene passed from his consciousness....

Just how long he had remained unconscious, Wesley Craig had no means of determining. His head was hurting devilishly; for a moment he thought that his plane had crashed, and that he was lying in the wreckage. Then he tried to move his hands, and found that he couldn't. They were bound. His eyes opened.

He discovered that he was lying flat on the ice, hands tied behind his back. Somebody was moaning softly. It was the girl. She too was tied. Wes tried to sit up; and a hand grasped his shoulder tightly and yanked him to his feet.

The big warrior who had felled him, his bloody sword still in hand, stared closely at the American, and fingered his fur jacket curiously. Presently he muttered a few words in some strange tongue. When Craig did not reply, he again spat out the words, his

dark brows bunching malevolently. And this time Wes understood part of what he said.

He was speaking ancient Egyptian!

That proved it. These three, who but half an hour before were dead and entombed in the ice, were Egyptians. Trying to cope with his returning bewilderment, Craig racked his brains for remnants of the difficult language. And finally said laboriously:

"Who—who art thou?"

A torrent of words broke from the warrior. Only a few were understandable.

"Shabako—Pharaoh Shabako!" And he repeated Craig's question: "Who art thou?"

The girl was sitting up now, and peering at the American. Her eyes were still tear-filled, for the dead body of the young man was at her side. She cried out a warning, and Craig caught most of it.

"Be careful, Stranger! He will slay thee as he slew Inaros!"

"Answer me! Who art thou?" repeated the warrior angrily. His patience was short; he played with the hilt of his sword.

"I come," said Wesley Craig slowly, groping for words, "from a far country. I found the three of you in this ice—dead. I brought thee back to life."

There was an astounded silence. Then the man who called himself Shabako deliberately cuffed his prisoner on the cheek. "Blasphemer!" he roared. "To claim the powers of the gods! Thou shall die for that! Yea, the ice entrapped me when I was about to slay the guilty Inaros—but our mighty god Aten restored me to life! Enough! The priests shall deal with thee!"

He jerked the trembling girl to Craig's side, and with a prick of his sword in their backs made them go forward. The American was too bewildered to think evenly. Why, the god Aten was the Sun God!—the divinity Egypt worshipped in five hundred B.C.? How

had these warm-blooded people come to the far north? Where did they live? And what fate lay in store for him?

He felt none too optimistic about his position. He knew that it would be two weeks before Somers, at the main base, would become alarmed at his absence. Unless, of course, the mechanic at the sub-base tried to beat his way back on foot, which was only barely possible.... Then he discovered that his automatic was still in its holster; it was slapping against his thighs; and he felt more hopeful.

The girl trudged tiredly at his side. Shabako was a few feet behind, grumbling and urging his captives along.

"Where does he drive us?" Craig asked softly. "What is thy name—and why did he slay thy companion?"

Her frightened eyes slanted towards his face. "To the Temple of the Sun God, Stranger," she whispered. "And there—" She broke off, to get control of the emotion she was feeling.

"There—what?"

"The God's awful hands!... Taia is my name. I do not know how I am once again alive, when a short while ago I was dead—but it matters not. I am a priestess of Aten, a virgin of the Temple. Inaros, he—he who lies behind—dared to love me. But a few hours gone he committed sacrilege, hiding in the Temple, so he could watch me. Pharaoh Shabako chanced on him, threatened death to us and pursued us out here. And then of a sudden, when Shabako was hurling his spear, we were entrapped ... and died...."

It was a strange story of forbidden love, one that might have been enacted in age-old times beneath the shadows of the pyramids. Craig began, "How did—" but a harsh voice cut his question short.

"Silence, infidel! Stir thy feet! This ice cools my blood!"

The American's plane, hidden from view behind the hillock, was left farther and farther in the rear, and Wes was surprised to find that he was being driven up

the very slopes of the ice-covered hill he had come to investigate.

At the top, he saw that the hill was a volcano, as he had guessed. There, in the center, was a wide gaping hole from which, in past ages, fiery streams of lava and ashes had belched forth. He was amazed to see that rude steps had been hacked in one side of the great cleft, and that they led sharply downwards. A faint warmth reached him, and he observed that there was but little ice in the crater cup, and none on the rocky walls where the hewn steps led down. It was here that these warm-blooded people lived!

As soon as Taia reached the steps she began to descend them, but Craig wasn't so docile. He told himself that this was his last chance; once below, surrounded by numbers, there might be no opportunity to strike for freedom. His eyes narrowed as he groped for a plan. If he could butt his brawny captor, strike him fairly in the solar plexus, and, while he lay helpless, cut his bonds with the sword....

He whirled around. Reverting to football tactics, he

tensed his lean, hard body and plunged squarely at Shabako.

The Pharaoh was taken completely by surprise, and went sprawling; but the sword did not pitch from his hand. He had received a stiff, shrewd blow, but only a glancing one, for he had twisted his body at the last second. Now, sputtering with wrath, he scrambled to his feet and whipped back his blade for a killing slice at the American.

It was Taia who saved him, then. In a flash she threw herself against the sword arm and deflected the sweep.

"Wait, O Pharaoh!" she cried breathlessly. "The priests will claim this stranger; 'tis they who must decide his fate! Do not kill him here!"

Shabako's face was livid with wrath; rage choked him; but he paused. The girl's aptly timed words had told. He was obviously not decided as to what to do. There was a pause, while the sword pointed straight at Craig's chest; then, grumbling, the Egyptian let down

his weapon.

"But try no more of thy tricks, dog!" he said harshly.
"Else thy death come before its time!"

Taia glanced appealingly at Wes. Her eyes were half-frightened. Craig smiled wryly. "Lead on!" he said.

Years of time fell away with each of their descending steps. Egypt stirred under the dust of the centuries; Egypt lived again, though in a sad mockery of her former glory. It was like a descent into a new world, yet a world that was, at the same time, as old as man's civilization....

Fifty or more steps they trudged down, then came suddenly to two dark corridors, both of which slanted steeply into the bowels of the earth. The one they took was mystic with deep shadows thrown by flaring oil lamps, cunningly imbedded in the walls of rock; and immediately into Wes's mind came the memory of a corridor he had once walked through in old Egypt, a corridor that pierced to the heart of a pyramid and the somber vault of a mummy who had once been

revered as the Pharaoh Aknahton. In his nostrils now there seemed to be that same, musty, age-old smell; the same hushed gloom was about him; his eyes saw dimly on the walls the same rows of hieroglyphs telling of long-past deeds of warriors and priests.

But there the similarity ended. In Egypt it had been a dead Pharaoh; here, though even yet he could hardly believe it, a living one—living by grace of modern science—walked warily behind him, and a living virgin of the temple at his side. The sword of the Pharaoh was pricking his back.

The passageway they trudged down became one of many. Others angled from it frequently, all dark, all hushed, all seemingly devoid of people. The volcano—extinct, almost surely, for the warmth was only that of the earth—was honey-combed with corridors. The marvelous ingenuity of the Egyptian race had come into play in fashioning this warm home in the barren arctic wastes. But Craig's ever-alert eyes warned him of what was to come. The characters, the hieroglyphs, the rude forms of Egyptian gods on the jagged walls were of degenerate character—and always, when

degeneration sets in, the cruellest form of worship has been chosen. The worship of Aten, the Sun God, Wes recalled, was one that demanded human sacrifice....

Still they went down. Savage crevices, split in the days when the volcano roared with fire and gushing lava, were skirted; crude ladders reached down ever-recurring pits, beneath which there was always another corridor, and always leading down. Craig could not reckon the depth they must be at; he knew that the heat was growing, though, and that his skin was wet with perspiration beneath his furs. He started to ask Taia the question that ceaselessly tormented him—how her race had come to the arctic; but a prick from Shabako's sword silenced him.

Then the passageway they were in widened. There was a bend just ahead. Through the gloom came the sonorous chant of many voices.

"The Temple!" whispered Taia.

They turned the bend, and saw, ahead, lit by a thick

cluster of oil lamps which threw a broad swathe of yellowish light, two tall columns of corrupt Egyptian design. They framed the entrance to the Sun God's Temple. The full volume of a chant of worship from inside poured through them.

Shabako's sword brooked no pause. He drove his prisoners straight through.

A host of impressions thronged Wes's bewildered eyes: a huge, misty-dark room, columns lining it—the vague form of a great idol squatting at the far end, massed people bowed before it—a weird chant rising into murmuring echoes along the high, dim ceiling. There were priests standing rigidly in front of the idol, their hands stretched high; and every eye was upon them. None saw the three in the doorway until a roar split the drone of worship.

"Way! Way for thy Pharaoh, Shabako the Fourth!"

Shabako had stepped for the moment in front of his prisoners. His sword blade was waved aloft; his bawl rudely interrupted the ceremony. The chant stopped,

and silence fell as the priests whirled around. The worshippers, too, turned and stared at the man who had broken the service with his imperious command.

"Way!" the vibrant voice cried again. "Aside for thy Pharaoh, who returns to the shrine of Aten, Father of Life!"

Some sixty bewildered faces peered at the man. The silence of the buried Temple was solid, awesome. Through the mist of wreathing incense-smoke and heavy shadows the giant head of the idol stared down, cruel in the coldness of the rock it had been chiselled from.

But a pathway cleared in the thick of the crowd, and, without a glance to either side, Shabako's proud figure strode down it, driving his prisoners before him.

Craig heard low gasps of astonishment, glimpsed the people fall back as he walked forward, saw the amazement in their eyes. The statue of the god seemed to grow as he neared the altar; it was in

squatting posture, with hands outstretched, one above the other. The American was to learn the reason for that position later. Now he had only a fleeting impression of it, for a man stepped from his ceremonial position beside the god's feet and met Shabako halfway.

His face was thin and cunning, with slanted rat's eyes. Ornate head-dress and stiffly inlaid robes denoted him to be the High Priest. He held a claw-like hand high.

"Hold!" he bade shrilly. "Who art thou to come thus into the Temple, calling thyself Shabako—Shabako, who has been dead these twenty years?"

The words were a thunderbolt of surprise, both to the Pharaoh and Taia, and to Wes Craig. He could not see Shabako's face, but he saw his tall form pause, and his tensed muscles relax.

"Dead ... these twenty years?" the Egyptian at last repeated slowly, struggling to overcome the shock. "Why, 'twas but a few hours ago that I left this

Temple, in pursuit of—" He peered at the priest's sly face. "Who art thou?" he demanded suddenly.

"Hrihor, High Priest of Aten."

Craig heard the girl whisper something, inaudible because of her surprise, but Shabako's bewildered voice cut in:

"Hrihor! It cannot be! Thou art not Hrihor! When last I saw Hrihor, he was an under-priest of twenty. Ay was High Priest of the Temple! Call him! Where is Ay?"

"Dust," said the priest. "Dust these ten years and more."

Wes's senses were reeling. The bodies in the ice—he had taken it for granted they had only lain there for days; a week at most. That they had been entrapped for twenty years was incredible. Had he known that, he would not even have thought of using the Kundrenaline. Twenty years ago he had been a boy of eight; it meant—Lord!—it meant the youthful girl beside him was twice her age; and Shabako an old

man! Old—yet young! Fantastic, unimaginable—yet true!

He saw Shabako pass a hand over his face, as if his body were suddenly tired; but the next moment it tautened again and he swung around. His face was unreadable. A multitude of conflicting emotions struggled there. He strode to a group of several of the older men.

"Look at me!" he cried, facing them squarely. "Look well at my features! Am I not he who twenty years ago—as the High Priest says—pursued the priestess and her lover into the land of ice? Am I not the man who ruled thee? Am I not Shabako? Is this not the priestess, Taia?"

They stared at him. Remembrance suddenly gleamed on their faces. A thin, cracked voice shrilled:

"Yea! Thou art Shabako! Thou art Shabako as he was twenty years ago—old, yet without the lines of age on thy brow! And the priestess—well do I remember her. That is she!"

A hand pointed at the trembling girl; all eyes centered on her. The High Priest's mouth dropped open, and he believed.

Then Shabako breathed deeply, drew himself up and with kingly dignity faced the ranks of his people, sword again held imperiously aloft.

"Thou hast seen!" he cried. "Thou hast heard! Here is the guilty Taia—and here am I, returned to thee, still with the strength of my prime! As I was about to slay the rash Inaros, the ice entrapped us, and for twenty years we lay thus, while my spirit pursued those two guilty ones across the River of Death. Then Aten aided me, filled my veins with His holy fire and melted the ice from our bodies. We lived and breathed again. With His divine help I slew Inaros and brought the transgressing virgin back to the Temple. Twenty years have passed—but of years Aten thinks nothing. Give praise to our God!"

A breathless silence swallowed his shout. Then a mighty roar burst out, an exultant roar that soared up past the impassive image of the god and rolled in

thunderous echoes along the roof. "Praise to Aten!
Praise to Aten!"

Wesley Craig smiled wryly. He could hardly credit the Kundrenaline's power in wiping twenty years away; but it was evidently true. Shabako, he saw, really believed the superstition-conceived story he had just spun, so—now what?

The High Priest was staring at him malevolently, his slanted eyes fastened on his garb of furs. His weedy voice pierced through the echoes.

"O divine Shabako," he questioned shrilly, "who is this stranger?"

The Pharaoh's glance was contemptuous. "A blasphemer," he said harshly. "One who dares claim —"

But Wes had understood the question. He stepped forward. Frankly and simply, he told his story.

"I found thy ruler and the maid and her lover in the

ice, entrapped," he concluded. "I cut them out and, with a fluid which is of common knowledge in my country, restored them to life. I told this to Shabako, but he overpowered me and—"

"Hear thou!" bawled the Pharaoh, furiously breaking in. "Blasphemy! He claims the might of the God! Back, dog, lest I kill thee here myself!"

Wes saw how hopeless it was; he shrugged and stepped back. He read all too plainly the hatred in Shabako's eyes; his frank story had also apparently inflamed the High Priest against him. There was not a friend in the whole Temple, save the girl—and the next moment Hrihor walked to her.

His slanted eyes ran over her figure. A sneering smile appeared. "So!" he observed mockingly. "Taia is returned to the Temple! Yes, well do I remember thee now—the scornful cast of thy mouth, the proud bearing of thy head. Even Aten thou were scornful of, I remember. Aten remembers too!" He turned slightly. "Listen, O Shabako. Three days ago thy elected successor, Siptah, died. We had met to choose a new

ruler. But, by the will of the God, thou art returned and art again Pharaoh. Thy people are grateful to Aten. In twelve hours a sacrifice shall proclaim our gratitude." His crafty eyes again swung to the girl. "There!" he shrilled, "—she pays for her sin. She is the sacrifice!"

There was a great shout from the crowd, but the words that Shabako then cried savagely were plainly audible to Wes Craig.

"Aye. Taia. O High Priest—and the blasphemous stranger, too! Both shall die in the hands of Aten!"

The priest nodded, smiling cruelly. "'Tis well, Shabako. Both shall die!"

Taia's frightened eyes met Craig's, then lifted to the form of the idol. He too peered up at it, and for the first time its hideousness and the cold-blooded cruelty of its design struck him.

The rudely carved figure was a full forty feet high. The impassive face, horrible in the lifelessness of

rock, stared unseeingly down on its worshippers. One gross black hand was held some ten feet above the palm of the other, and, inserted in its palm, was a long, keen-pointed blade. The living sacrifice would be tied to the lower palm; the upper, by some trickery, would be made to slowly descend....

A surge of panic swept over Craig. In his mind he saw the slight, helpless form of the girl strapped to that grim paw, saw the knife inch down, saw it touch and prick and finally drive through her heart. And it would be the same for him! A flame of blind fury burst in him, making him reckless; mad.

"The hell we die!" he yelled, in English, and with a great bound he was at Taia's side. A priest leaped for him, but Craig shot a foot out and sent him sprawling. Then, with eyes flaming and legs outthrust, he stood in front of the girl, facing the worshippers.

"Fools!" he roared. "Listen to me! My words are truthful! I do not lie, as does thy Pharaoh! I can prove that which I say! I can—"

"Take him!" the High Priest shrieked. "Forward! Take him!"

Craig could handle one or two, but not a dozen. A mass of men, women, soldiers, priests, swept at him. There was a brief moment of struggle, of oaths and shouts and excited yells from the crowd in the Temple, till something thudded into the American's head and he went down. Feet trampled him; men surged over him; then blessed unconsciousness enveloped him, and he knew no more.

He did not hear, as did Taia, Shabako's command:

"To a chamber with them! Guard them well, till the time of sacrifice!"

A small party, led by the stocky figure of the captain of the Pharaoh's guard, wound its way through a network of corridors, past jagged walls down which water slowly dripped, across a swaying bridge of hides that spanned an awful chasm in the volcano's very heart, and came at last to a large dark hole in the rock.

The captain turned. "In there!" he commanded harshly. The two figures, man and girl, were dumped like sacks of flour into the gloomy chamber. The men who had carried them turned and tramped away; the captain faced one who had stayed.

"Guard them with thy life, Sitah. Thou knowest the payment for carelessness."

Sitah nodded grimly. He was fully armed, with spear and sword. He sat down outside the dark hole, and the captain retraced his steps. The pad of his feet on the floor died away, and then, for a long time, there was silence.

Perhaps every five minutes Sitah turned and stared down into the hole behind, ears craned for the slightest sound. But none came. The two inside, no doubt, were asleep.

It was very hot, down in the deep-buried corridor, and though Sitah was accustomed to the heat, he soon found his eyelids drooping and his whole body crying out for sleep. But he did not go to sleep. He knew too

well what would befall him in Aten's hands if he did. He had seen many old men and women die in those hands, on ceremony days—old people who croaked in helpless agony as the keen knife blade dropped slowly down toward them, paused a second, inches from their hearts, and then plunged in with a rush. Old men and women, useless, their years of service gone. Yes, and many unwanted girl children....

That was what the Sun God demanded. His hands reached ever for human bodies. It was cruel, but he was a god; and who was to question the will of a god?

Sitah was very glad when, after six hours of lonely vigil, another guard relieved him and took his place outside the dark hole. Sitah spoke humorously to him, a grim kind of humor, as befitting one who has seen much death.

"They sleep, Hapu," he said, nodding into the prison. "But soon a longer sleep will come for them—the sleep of the knife!" He chuckled as he made his way far below, to his bed. A few hours of rest and he would be in fine fettle for the ceremony.

The relieving guard grunted and peered into the cell. He saw two dark figures outstretched, mere blobs of black, a little blacker than the shadows. Yes, they slept....

He sat down on the bench Sitah had just vacated. He had four hours to wait. Then the priests, led by Hrihor, would come, and the ceremony would begin, and the god's hands would move together. It would be a fine show! He looked forward to it keenly. It would be delicious to see that girl Taia bared to the knife. It would please the god: seldom did his hands hold such a beautiful sacrifice. And the queer stranger, too—he would probably die very noisily. When he saw the knife sliding down, he would regret his blasphemy and shriek for forgiveness!

For along time Hapu sat quite motionless. He was a good watchdog. Hours passed; his vigil was nearing its end; the priests would soon come. Soon—

A slight noise came from the cell behind him.

He whirled around. The noise came again, louder. A

voice cried out.

"Water! Water! I am dying!"

Hapu grunted. It was the stranger's voice. The stranger must not die; it would spoil the ceremony; Aten would be wroth. He stared into the hole.

One of the figures was tossing, writhing painfully. The agonized cry echoed again. "Water! Please! I am dying!"

Hapu strode into the cell.

For a moment he stood still, peering down at the tossing figure. His brain suddenly shouted alarm. This was no human body! "What—" he began.

But the question was never finished. Something hard crashed into the back of his skull; his spear dropped with a clank, and he slumped to the floor.

Out of the shadows, behind, a man emerged and bent down over the outstretched figure of the guard. A

smile appeared on the man's lean face: the guard was out—cold. It took Wes Craig just a moment to ascertain this; then he tiptoed over to a dark form that lay on the floor—the girl, whose pale, anxious face peered up out of the shadows. Craig cut her bonds with the guard's sword and raised her to her feet. She stood close to him, clinging to him, trembling, almost not believing she was free.

Her eyes were filled with awe as she looked up into the American's eyes. "First thou didst restore me to life," she whispered, "and now thou hast broken thy bonds. Surely, thou must be a god!"

Wes smiled. "It was simple, Taia. Look! This buckle on my belt—'tis sharp. I edged it round and cut the rope. It was slow work, else we would have been free long before."

"But I saw thee toss and writhe on the floor, and cry out for water!"

Craig kicked a pile of furs that had been heaped one on top of the other, and tied together with thread

from an unraveled woolen mitten. "This was my body," he said coolly. "Furs. The cell must be a storeroom for them—lucky for us. I was standing with a rock in my hand near the door, when I cried out for water... We shall not die in Aten's hands, Taia! See—I have a sword. With luck—"

There was a warmer quality than reverence in Taia's eyes when she spoke—though she did not realize it. "Then come quickly, O Stranger!" she said. "The guard has been changed once; the time for sacrifice nears!"

Craig nodded. Only a sword was in his hand; his automatic, he found, had been taken from him while he lay unconscious in the Temple, probably desired as a curious heathen object. The discovery, made when he had cut his bonds, had been a serious blow to his hopes: with a sword, he was only a human being, but with a gun he might have passed as supernatural to this primitive race.

But it could not be helped. He peered to each side, gestured to the girl, and together they started up the

sloping incline of the corridor.

The heat of the earth was great, down where they were, and it made the passageway muggy and odorous. Fitful shadows were flung by widely separated oil lamps as they pressed forward—grotesque splotches of black that half a dozen times tightened the American's grasp on his sword, sure that a guard had come upon them. He knew that their margin of time in which to effect escape was small, and he gradually quickened their pace, sacrificing caution for speed. Taia's hand was in his left; and he had just turned to her to ask if they were taking the best course up to the surface, when suddenly she stopped short.

"Hearken!" she whispered, frightened.

Wes craned his ears. For a moment there was nothing but silence. Then a faint sound trembled through the shadows. It could only have been that of many approaching footsteps.

"The priests!" Taia murmured, tightening her grip on

his hand. "They come!"

There was a sharp bend in the corridor fifty feet ahead; from behind it a growing clatter of sandals echoed through the rock-walled passageway. Craig paused, irresolute. "Are we blocked, ahead?" he asked.

"Yes," her low voice hurriedly told him. "But we can go back, cross the bridge of the chasm and go up the other side. But others may be there, and—"

A shout cut her words short. Dim figures appeared around the bend in the passage. They were discovered!

Wes Craig's face set grimly; he worked his hand into a good grip on the sword handle, looked levelly at the gathering crowd ahead and said:

"I think it best to face them now, Taia. I can hold them for minutes at least; thou canst perhaps escape. Rest assured I shall take that High Priest with me, when I cross thy River of Death!"

"But where can I go?" cried the girl. "Nay, Divine One—I shall stay at thy side!"

The excited yells of Hrihor, urging the others forward, came plainly to their ears. Swords glittered in the gloom of the corridor, and like a foam-tipped wave that slowly gathers speed the group of priests and soldiers charged down on the man and girl. Craig saw that she would not run.

"Then come!" he shouted, and swung her around. With desperate speed they retraced their steps. They soon passed their cell, and recklessly leaped through the deceptive shadows on the far side, on down the corridor.

The High Priest and the others followed close behind. His crafty face was distorted with rage, and he kept screaming to his men: "The wrath of the God on thee if they escape!" Craig's ears caught that, and he found time for a bitter smile. If! If only they had left him his automatic! A few bullets flung into them would even matters a trifle.

The corridor twisted and slanted ever downward. They panted around a corner and came to the brink of a dark pit. "Down!" cried the girl. She led the way, nimbly dropping down the fifteen-foot rawhide ladder that was there. Halfway down the ladder Wes reached up with his sword and cut it from where it was fastened. He fell to the bottom of the hole with a grunt. As he extricated himself from the ladder's entangling meshes he yelled up, "Come and get us, you cutthroats—if you can!" and was off after the lithe form of the girl.

But the action helped them but little, and added only a few feet to the distance between them and their pursuers, for they boldly made the deep drop without sending for another ladder. Taia was sobbing for air, and Wes himself beginning to feel the bitter pang of hopelessness when they rounded a corner and came to a great chasm—a wide cleft in the very heart of the volcano. A terrific heat came from its maw of unbroken black, and a peculiar, choking odor, sulphurous. Across it was a slender framework of hides and thongs—a mere catwalk over the terrible

depths below.

"You first!" Craig snapped, and as Taia started across a spear came hurtling from the mob behind, and clanked against the rocky wall on the far side. Nimbly Taia sped over the bridge, and Wes, the yells of Hrihor and his men loud in his ears, followed.

Midway a long spear snaked after him. It missed by inches, and went pitching into the gulf. In his haste he caught his foot on the interlaced thongs, stumbled and almost fell—which saved his life, for another spear streaked through the very spot he had been a second before. Then he was across, and his sword was flashing in vicious hacks at one of the two main supporting thongs of the bridge.

The hide was tough, but Craig's strength was that of a desperate man, and in several mighty strokes he severed it. The framework slumped to one side, held only by one thong. Hrihor, half across, croaked in sudden horror and sprang back as he saw the stranger raise his blade to carve through the other support. But even as the sword swept down a spear

streamed from a warrior's hand and thudded against Wes's right shoulder.

His sword jarred loose. It fell into the chasm.

"Thou art hurt!" cried the girl. Wes grinned wryly.

"Nay," he said, "but weaponless. Lead on!"

They were now on the other side of the chasm in the tunneled volcano. The priests had hesitated a moment when the bridge had slackened; but now, seeing the weaponless man and girl disappear in a tortuous corridor ahead, they sidled across the damaged catwalk after their fierce leader.

"They will go past the Temple!" Hrihor shrilled. "It is Taia who leads him: again she tries to escape to the land of ice! Follow—up here!"

His words were true. The corridor that led by the Temple was the one which led to the only other passage up to the crater of the volcano.

But Taia had guided Craig only a few steps past the place of worship, now a silent vault of impenetrable blackness when, turning a corner, the American felt her shrink back.

"Shabako comes!" she told him faintly.

Quickly he verified it. Led by the Pharaoh himself, a party of soldiers was coming down the corridor some thirty yards away. Even as Wes saw them, they saw him—and Shabako's roar of sudden alarm tingled his ears.

Priests behind, soldiers and the blood-lustful Pharaoh ahead. They were cut off, blocked, trapped. There was no nearby branch passage to run down; there was no way to turn. It was the end of the game.... But no, not quite, Craig told himself grimly. His sword was gone, but his fists would tell on them before he went down, before the paws of the idol finally claimed him....

He stepped before Taia, clenched his fists, and waited the shock of the charge.

He could see the fury in Shabako's narrowed eyes, so close were they, when a soft hand pulled him back. It was Taia's.

"Come!" she whispered, and darted swiftly back to the gloomy, shadow-filled entrance of the Temple. And wondering, Wes Craig followed.

She glided through the pillared portal and was immediately swallowed up by a shroud of silent, velvety darkness. Wes could not see her, but her soft hand touched his arm lightly to guide him forward, and he sensed the girl's warm body close to his. Where was she going? Inevitably they would be trapped in the far end of the Temple, beneath the very hands of the idol—or so he thought. But he trusted her, and went on.

A shout came from the entrance. "They went in here!" someone cried, and the two heard Shabako detailing swift instructions to his men—instructions which were cut short by another clatter of feet and the approaching voice of Hrihor. Priests and soldiers had joined, a confusion of men, most of them hanging

back, half afraid to venture into the well of blackness that was Aten's abode on earth.

But the Pharaoh whipped them into discipline with the harsh tones of his voice, and strung them into a close line, to advance slowly through the Temple.

"Have thy blades ready!" he added. "They cannot escape us now: they are trapped. Forward!"

Nothing could get through that line. It was like a fine-toothed comb, with every tooth a man. Craig saw it coming, and knew that he and the girl could not go much farther back, for already he sensed himself directly beneath the looming figure of Aten. Yet the gentle touch led him on—around and past the idol into the furthestmost corner of the Temple. It was then that Taia paused, felt around, and placed Craig's right hand upon some unseen knob in the wall. Her faint whisper hurriedly explained the purpose of the knob as Wes drank in her words eagerly.

"There is a secret room behind the idol, from whence the priests ape the God's voice and move his hands at sacrifice. A priest should be there e'en now, ready for

the ceremony. Thou must overcome him, Divine One, and we too can hide therein. Hrihor dare not search for us there while others are present, for e'en Shabako knows not of the room. Quick, then—they come! Thy hand is on the latch of the secret panel. I follow thee!"

Wes pressed the girl's hand tightly and his body tensed. Then, without hesitation, he jerked the secret panel back. A faint glow of light lay ahead, and he plunged into the tiny room that lay revealed.

An alarmed face stared up—the priest! Wes leaped at him, his steely fingers thumbing into the man's throat and throttling its scream to a gasping choke. All the American's pent-up fury went into a lunge that the priest could not begin to stand against. He was bowled sharply over and went down. Craig on top, and there the fight ended as suddenly as it had begun. The priest's head thudded into the smooth rock floor; a convulsion quivered his body; he moaned and lay still.

A grim flicker in his eyes, Craig got up and looked

around for Taia. Then astonishment and cold fear swept through him.

The secret door was closed—but she was not inside!

“Now what—” Wesley Craig gasped.

He did not dare finish the thought. He glared around, much as a trapped tiger does, his brain a turmoil. His eyes fell on a ladder that led up from the floor to a niche in the left wall—a slit about forty feet high, a pool of darkness, shadowed from the thin tongue of flame that lit the room. Only half realizing what the slit was, Wes sprang forward and leaped up the ladder. A platform was built high up inside the niche, a place for a man to stand on. The American reached it, pressed himself forward, and peered through a tiny hole that was in the rock ahead. He knew it ought to command a view of the Temple.

But if it did, Craig could see nothing, for there was no light in the huge vault outside. For minutes the brooding silence was not broken, save by an occasional scraping sound made by one of the

searching line of men. There was no hint of the girl who waited beside the hideous figure of the god, nor of the network that gradually closed in on her.

But suddenly the silence was shattered by a shout.

"I have her!" someone yelled. Then came a multitude of sounds. The piercing voice of Hrihor was audible above them all.

"Light the lamps! Hast thou the other, too?"

"Nay—he is not here."

"Not here? What—"

A spark of light made an erratic course from the Temple door: someone was bringing a flame to light the lamps. A moment later there was a flare of yellow light as the oil in a large wall lamp caught fire, and then the darkness melted further before a wave of light from the opposite wall. Now could be seen the warriors who, with gleaming outdrawn swords, were clustered around the girl. Shabako was gripping her

arm and shaking her roughly: the High Priest was drawing to a stop before her, to stand glaring at her with hate-inflamed eyes.

"Tell us!" roared the Pharaoh. "Where is the man?"

She looked at him levelly. Her eyes were quite calm, and she breathed evenly. There was a glorious light in her eyes as she replied.

"I will tell thee," she said; "though thou wilt not comprehend. He vanished. Vanished, even as a god. He was here beside me, in the darkness and then suddenly he was gone. But why not? For he was a god...."

The soldiers gaped at her. Silence came down in the Temple. The High Priest did not break it, but only stared closely at the girl with eyes that suddenly had something more than hate in them—comprehension, and a trace of fear....

But the Pharaoh Shabako's eyes were only wrathful, and he shouted:

"A god? Vanished, sayest thou? Lies! Lies! But thou canst not lie to Aten! The God knows of a way to loosen thy tongue!"

Despite herself, Taia shuddered. She knew that way.

Gradually the Temple was filling with other worshippers come to see the sacrifice, and soon there were sixty or seventy of them. The men outnumbered the women two to one, and none of them was very old. Fifty was about their age limit—and those who were near this age were reluctant to let their eyes rest on the hands of the idol. When they did glance at them, and at the cruel knife blade in the upper one, fear showed on their faces. There were also very few children....

Hrihor's thin features grew unreadable in the coldness that settled upon them. He was now in the role of High Priest: apart, separate from the common mob before him; interpreter of Aten's divine mysteries: playing his part of one who listened to a god's awful whisperings. Impassively he superintended the binding of Taia by a priestess, who

tightened the cords around the girl's slim body with claw-like hands, a gleam of unholy anticipation on her fleshless, soured face. Then the High Priest turned from the altar and faced the crowd of people.

"Silence!" he commanded. "Silence, before thy God Aten!"

A hush fell instantly. Their eyes centered on the bound figure of the girl, standing just beside the lowermost hand of the idol that would presently claim her. Her face was very pale, but none could detect fear in it. There was an uneasy stir, a shifting of feet, a mumbling, as her fresh young beauty struck the watchers. Somewhere a man muttered that she was very young to die. Aten had returned her once: perhaps the God did not wish her to perish.... His neighbor demurred. And the ceremony went on.

Ornate but crude censers were in the hands of two priests; the incense was lit by long tapers, and its acrid odor wound up in wavering purple spirals of smoke. On each side of Hrihor were five under-priests, eyes stiffly on their superior's impassive face.

The soldiers had retreated from the altar and now were massed in the rear of the Temple, their spear blades glittering dully above their heads.

The High Priest raised his hands slowly, and stared with glazed eyes into the gloom of the ceiling, high above. "Praise!" he shrilled. "Praise to Aten!"

The assembled worshippers joined him in the chant of sacrifice. It was low and soft, and, at first, almost drowsy, like the slow stir of a tropical wind through palm leaves. But soon it quickened with rising tones from perfectly concerted voices; it soared up; its tenor changed; it became fierce, lustful, eager for blood, eager for the sacrifice, a heathen chant shrilling for sight of a girl's body in the god's, awful hands.

And it died in a sad, discordant moan on an expectant note....

Hrihor's body, stiff and rigid in its ceremonial robes, did not seem human as he stretched his arms straight forward and wheeled silently to the huge idol of

stone. A full two minutes he stood without so much as flicking an eyelash; then, not shifting his glazed stare, he harshly intoned:

"Ages ago our ancestors set out from the homeland of Egypt in a great galley, bound for the barbarian countries of the north in quest of metal. But storms seized upon them, drove them far from their course, till at last, weak from hunger, they came to this land of ice, where their galley was wrecked and they were cast ashore. At first all was dark; then came the Sun God Aten's life giving rays, leading them to this mountain, which they inhabited and in which they carved this Temple wherein to worship the God who had saved them. The lord of the galley was the first Pharaoh; the priest of the galley was called High Priest; the Pharaoh took a concubine to wife—and thus was our civilization begun.

"There were virgins of the Temple, holy, set apart from man, sacred to Aten. Never did one betray her sacred trust—never, until Taia fled to the land of ice with the sacrilegious Inaros. Our mighty Pharaoh pursued them, and after twenty years, by Aten's

special grace, slew the man and brought the maid back to pay for her transgression. Never before has this happened."

He paused, waiting. An under-priest spoke; evidently following some ritual.

"Here is the priestess, O High Priest of Aten! What penalty must she pay?"

"Death in Aten's hands!" the cold voice shrilled instantly. "The God wills it!"

But now came an interruption, unexpected and disconcerting to the well-laid plans of Hrihor. The voice of Pharaoh Shabako cried out:

"Another came with this priestess—a blasphemous stranger! He lies concealed; the maid will not tell where! High Priest, let her be tortured in Aten's hands until she reveals where he is!"

For a moment Hrihor lost his mask-like rigidity, of expression. His eyes shifted nervously. But Shabako

was not to be denied. Again he repeated his demand.

"We must pray to Aten to make his hand descend on her, prick and gash her, till she divulges!"

A murmur arose from the people in the Temple: they approved the torture. Hrihor, obviously reluctant, was forced to comply.

"O mighty Aten," he cried, turning to the idol, "thou hast heard our Pharaoh. We pray to thee to lay thy hand on the priestess Taia, till she tells where the stranger lies concealed!"

Shabako nodded in approval. While a mumbled prayer rose, four priests strode to the girl, lifted her slight form and flung it on the upturned lower band of the idol. They strapped her there securely, her breast but ten feet below the waiting knife. Even then she did not struggle or cry out.

She did not know who had won the fight inside the secret room, but her heart told her it was the mysterious stranger, for was he not a god?—She

would not be afraid, for he would surely reveal his divinity, and save her, even as he had from her twenty-year death, and from her bonds in the cell where they had been imprisoned....

The softly chanted prayer surged through the Temple. Hrihor's slitted eyes were on the knife in the upper palm of the idol. Suddenly he flung up his arms, and cried:

"Now, O Aten!"

The prayer stopped. With fearful interest the people stared at the dagger, at the inert figure of the girl—the more elderly seeing in her a hint of what was to come to them when their days of service were ended.

The knife started downward.

Taia's eyes were closed. Her breathing was even and regular. She did not seem at all aware of the shaft of steel that slowly, in the hushed gasp from the

audience, stirred with the stone hand that held it and moved deliberately downward.

To the silent crowd of worshippers it was a religious phenomenon, and well calculated to strike fear and awe into their hearts. The moving idol seemed to be a living thing, motivated by the unseen spirit of the god it represented, who caused the massive upper hand to execute his will. Its movement was slow and clumsy, and close listeners would have heard a slight creaking noise from somewhere behind it—but the ears of the worshippers were deaf from the fear and the horror in which they were vicariously participating.

Slowly the hands came together, until the long, wicked shear was but a foot above the bound girl.... It dropped to within inches of her flesh....

And there it stopped.

Then, before the amazed crowd could realize what was happening, before even Hrihor could control the surprise that raised his brows incredulously, the palm in which the blade was implanted slowly retraced its

course and returned to its original position.

A breathless silence reigned in the Temple. The hand was motionless. It did not stir again.

"The God will not touch his priestess!"

It was a faint, awed whisper that came from someone amongst the worshippers. But Hrihor heard it, and so did the other priests. While they stared at each other, utterly at a loss, the whisper was taken up and repeated on all sides.

"The God will not touch his priestess!"

The High Priest sensed the crowd's conviction, and sensed them turning against him. His beady eyes glanced around nervously. His lips a thin line, he called to his second ranking priest in a tense whisper, and, when the other came to him, muttered in his ear:

"'Tis the stranger, hiding in the secret chamber, who does this! He has overcome our brother there, and now controls the levers! And Taia knows it; and if she

reveals it to the people our hold will be broken! She must be killed!"

"Yes! But how? We must be quick!"

Hrihor's crafty face set cruelly. "I know a way. Watch thou...."

He strode to the fore of the altar and flung his hands high. A shrill shout from his thin lips cut the uneasy murmuring short.

"Hearken! Aten will not torture His own priestess! He will not maim those who have sworn their lives to Him!"

The silent crowd waited for his next words. He screamed savagely.

"His High Priest must perform the rite! Aten has appointed me to be His instrument of vengeance!"

A gleam of unholy exultation was in his narrowed eyes. His face worked: he thrust a hand inside his

ornate ceremonial vestment.

"By Divine Will," he cried, "this knife in my hand is the knife in the God's hand!"

And he whipped a long blade from the robe.

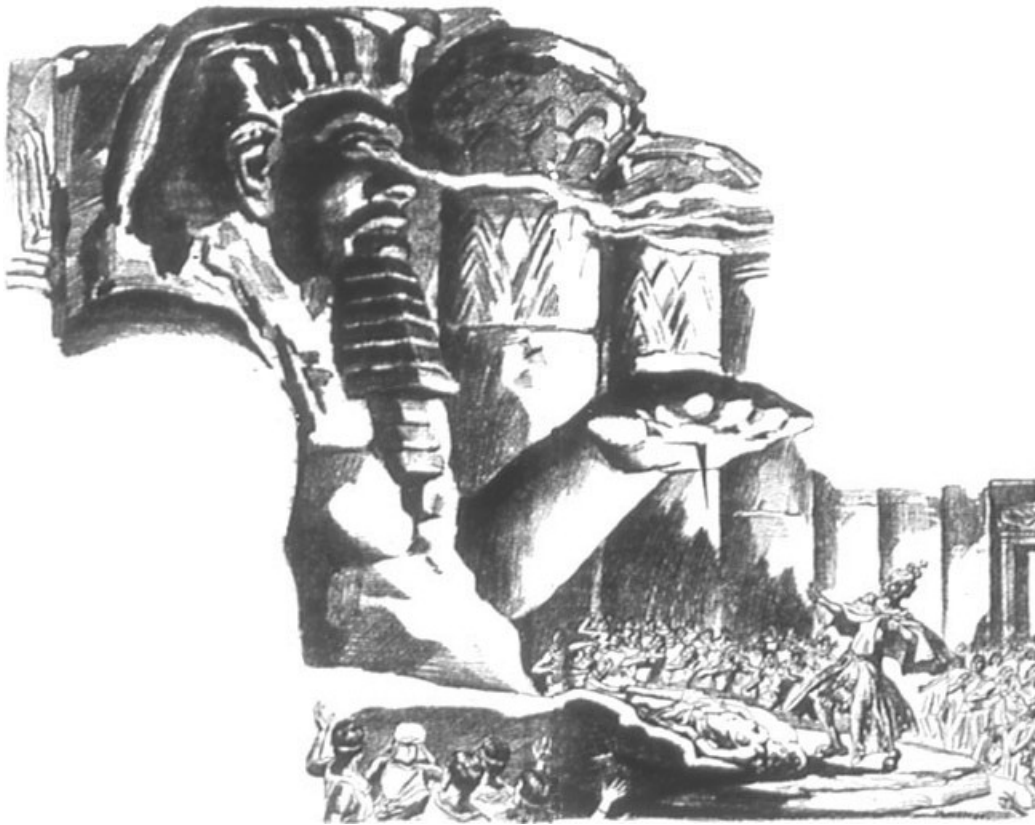
Never before had such a ceremony been held in the Temple of Aten, the Sun God. Never before had the hand of the god paused above the living sacrifice and deliberately risen again without tasting blood. It was miracle upon miracle; half-bewildered, Pharaoh Shabako and the herd of common people alike waited for what would come next, their High Priest's savage words somewhat reassuring them that all was correct.

They saw him clench his dagger tightly and with slow steps advance to the side of the helpless girl. Glaring down at her, he swung the blade high. It poised directly over her heart. It would not torture her, Taia knew: it was death that she read in the High Priest's eyes. She closed her own, and thought of the stranger; she breathed a silent prayer to him. She

waited.

"In Aten's name!" screamed Hrihor, and brought the dagger down.

At that second the sharp roar of a sudden explosion thundered through the Temple, and the startled worshippers saw, slowly trickling from the right eye of Aten, a curling streamer of gray smoke. They did not know what had happened. And not until, after a moment of fearful silence, they saw the expression on Hrihor's face change to great surprise, and saw his right hand relax and drop the dagger to the floor, did they comprehend that he had been struck down.



He clutched at his side, staggered, twisted round, and fell full length before the feet of the god whose representative he was.

A frightened woman close to the altar saw a dark red stain on his robe, and a scream from her lips pierced out:

"He is dead! Killed by Aten—whose eyes have looked death! Oh!"

She flung herself flat on the floor, and the others, back to the soldiers in the rear, did likewise. The priests clustered together in a scared group, staring fearfully at the right eye of the idol, from which a wisp of smoke was still trailing. None dared approach the outstretched figure of the High Priest. Only Shabako dared look at him.

The Pharaoh clutched his sword tightly, muttering uneasily to himself. Not a sound came from the prostrate multitude. The slow echoes of the explosion died away; again the heavy silence fell. Then Shabako suddenly stared around, and peered up at the stone image of the god.

His ears had caught a sound. It was a panting and scuffling noise, as if men were fighting. It grew, even though muffled by apparently intervening rock. The beginning of a scream, cut short into a choke, added to its volume. The worshippers far back in the Temple heard it, and looked up. There was a muffled crash—then another crash of thundering noise, similar to the one that had come from the god's eye.

But this time no smoke eddied from the eye. The explosion echoed through the Temple and died away, while all the time Pharaoh Shabako stared at the idol. Slow comprehension broke through the bewilderment on his face. Suddenly he swung around and gripped the cowering form of the second ranking priest, who stood near him.

"From whence came those sounds, Priest?" he hissed. "Tell me!"

The frightened priest gibbered unintelligibly, but there was a guilty look on his face which spurred Shabako on. He shook the man and roared the question again. Then the priest spoke.

"They came—from—the secret chamber," he stammered.

A gasp rose from the crowd behind. But before they could master their astonishment, Shabako had whipped his sword from its sheath and sprung up the altar.

"Show me this chamber!" he cried.

Up on the platform in the secret room, his eye glued to the hole that was the eye of Aten, Wes Craig had seen and heard everything that had transpired. He had been shocked to see the brave thing Taia had submitted to, rather than divulge where he was hidden. Sacrificing herself, so that he, a stranger, might have a few more minutes of life! It hurt.

He had climbed down from the platform and glared around the lower floor of the secret room again, scanning shelves that were crowded with scores of curious objects, sacred relics, properties to aid in the manipulation of the idol and other unidentifiable things—looking for a potential weapon. If the girl had to die—and he—it would be better to go out and meet his enemies, taking some of them with him in full fight.

And then his heart leaped madly at the sight of something lying on one of the shelves.

A stumpy black shape, it was, with a short barrel of

cold blue steel, and it looked as much out of place in that chamber as did the fur-clad man who stared half-unbelievingly at it. It was a foreigner, as he was, in the gloomy corridors and chambers of the race that worshipped Aten. It too was American. It was a friend—his automatic!

To Wes Craig, bewildered and tired and sadly without hope, it almost seemed to be alive, smiling at him with its wicked round mouth. He picked it up, and it bolstered his courage, his hope and his energy enormously. At once he leaped to the closed entrance-door and felt for the lever that opened it. But there he paused a moment to think.

There was only the faintest chance of fighting free with Taia now. There were at least thirty men outside, and he had only seven bullets. And then he remembered where he was, and what the purpose of the secret room was. He remembered, also, a certain nervous expression on the High Priest's face that he had just seen....

He swung around and inspected the levers and crude

wheels of wood that led to a handle up in the niche, shoulder-high to whoever might stand on the platform there. He had had experience with certain idols in Egypt. He remembered particularly one that had been worshipped in a degenerate age—its hands, its eyes. And then he stepped over the sprawling body of the still unconscious priest and climbed to the platform and his peep-hole again.

As he pressed himself forward in the niche, and applied his eye to the slit, he gently fingered the handle of the large lever right beside him. And he also measured the size of the slit in the right eye of the god....

Craig had not minded shooting the murderous High Priest Hrihor, but he did not want to kill the under-priest in the secret room. He had had no choice in the matter. At the tensest moment in the dramatic scene in the Temple, just when he had been hoping that the mysterious death he had sent to Hrihor would frighten the worshippers away, he had heard a slight rustling sound behind him, and had turned just in time to see a hate-distorted face within feet of him,

and a short curved-knife upraised to strike him in the back. It was the priest, whom he had left unconscious below, now revived and coming to kill him.

Wes could have shot the man then and there, but he knew the thunder of his gun would betray his presence; so, using the weapon as a club he had struck out at his attacker and tried to block the thrust of the knife. For a moment he was successful; but the knife proved the better weapon in the close rough and tumble scuffle that ensued and, with its point at his very throat, Wes had been forced to shoot.

He had killed the man instantly, but he felt no slightest relief. Like a tiger—even before the crashing echoes had died away in the little room—he sprang back to his peep-hole to see what the effect was outside. And just what he feared most was happening. The frightened priest in the Temple was telling the suspicious Shabako about the hidden chamber—and even then was leading him to the secret entrance!

The two passed the American's line of vision, and after a moment he heard them fumbling at the catch

of the panel. He could shoot them both down, easily, but there would still be a whole Temple full of warriors and priests to be faced with only three bullets!

Then, in a flash, came an inspiration.

Wes swung around, leveled the automatic's muzzle at the hole in the idol's eye, sighted carefully, and squeezed the trigger. And as the explosion boomed through the vast chamber outside, he veered the gun in a different aim and fired again and again.

The two huge oil lamps, imbedded one in each side wall, splintered and crashed.

"Now for it!" Wes Craig muttered. He sprang for the ladder, snatching the dagger of the dead priest as he passed, and half-slid, half-tumbled to the floor below. At once he was at the secret door and grasping the lever that worked it; and, pausing only to take a deep breath, he plunged out.

He came into a scene of wildest confusion. Panic-

stricken screams rang in his ears; the oil from the cracked lamps, transformed into splatters of flame, had splashed down from the walls and scattered fire over much of the floor. A tumult of shadows moiled through the flames as the crowd fought to get free. Shrieks and gasps and curses cut through the air: the worshippers were caught up in a mob panic caused more by their superstitious frenzy than by the understandable fire. The flames pierced fantastically into the blackness, throwing a vivid glow on the frantic faces of the people who struggled to get out of their reach. The altar was deserted, save for the girl who still lay on the hand of the idol....

Wes Craig, a blur in the wavering shadows, darted to her side. His dagger sped through the cords that bound her, and he lifted her slight form down. For a moment she clung to him.

"I knew thou wouldst come, Divine One!" she whispered. "I knew!"

He smiled for answer, gripped her hand, and then swiftly led her along the least crowded wall of the

Temple towards the door, packed with a frantic, struggling crowd of soldiers, people and priests.

The deceptive shadows thrown by the flames were kind to them; for some time no one in the whole crowd recognized the two. Everyone was reacting in a blind panic of fear from the mysterious thunders that had killed their High Priest, splintered the lamps, and caused the resultant inferno of leaping fire. But discovery was inevitable, and at last one did see the fleeing pair—one who had kept his head and was looking for them. It was Shabako. He roared:

"The stranger escapes—and the girl! There, there! Hold them!"

His imperative shout brought a measure of control to the soldiers, who were fighting to get through the doorway. They grouped uncertainly together, gripping their swords and staring wildly around. They saw, in the ruddy light of the flames, a grim-faced man pressing into them, holding in one hand a stubby black object, and in the other the arm of the sacrifice, Taia.

Wes cursed, and, forgetting that the warriors understood no English, ordered them in that tongue to make way for him. For answer, one of them leaped out at him, his sword swinging up. Craig's face set; he levelled the automatic and fired. The bullet caught the man in the midst of his leap; he spun round, his sword clanked to the floor, and he fell.

Wes fired again at the staring mob; then again; but the last time only a sharp click answered his trigger finger. He flung the gun into the thick of the hesitating warriors, swept the dead soldier's sword off the floor and pressed forward, intending to hack his way through.

But he did not have to. The other warriors were only human. They had just seen uncanny, instant death. They shrank back from the door; some even ran back from the stranger, preferring the flames to the thunder-death that he meted out. The doorway was cleared, and Craig pulled the girl through.

"Back to the left!" she gasped. "Across the bridge! Quick—Shabako comes!"

Even as they ran, they heard the Pharaoh's furious bawling as he struggled up to the door of the Temple, which he had not been able to reach for the rolling tide of fear-stricken people around him. He was shouting:

"After them—after them! They cross the bridge! Follow them, everyone! I will take the other way up and trap them! Hurry!"

He turned to the right, panting up the corridor in the direction from which he had first approached the Temple. And slowly, as they collected their dazed wits, the swarm of warriors and priests and common people followed the fleeing pair toward the bridge.

Wes Craig was tired, but the shouting pursuit lent strength to his near-exhausted limbs. Spears snaked after Taia and him from the warriors close behind; but, once across the dangerous bridge, he disregarded them long enough to hack its supports through and see it fade into the blackness beneath. "Get across now, damn you!" he yelled, and ran again after the girl's leading figure.

All now depended on their speed in reaching the top of the extinct volcano, and of that speed he was none too confident. He had gone through two strength-sapping fights in the last hour; his nerves were ragged from the constant strain, and his breath came in racking sobs. He wished passionately he had a loaded gun—even his smashed vial of Kundrenaline. The fluid would have put marvelous new life in his weary limbs.

"Hurry, Taia!" he gasped: "we must beat them! Shabako goes some other way to head us off! If only we can get to my bird-that-flies-in-the-air!"

Once again they stumbled up the difficult passage, fighting for speed with tired bodies, bodies which every twist and obstacle tried sorely. Without the girl, Wes could never have made it: she led him unerringly through the branching, gloomily-lit corridors, up flights of rickety steps, her knowledge of several short-cuts aiding measurably the speed of their progress. Tired as he was, admiration for the mighty fire of courage that burned in Taia's frail figure, and drove it forward when all physical strength was gone,

never left him. For she had been through as much as he—and even more!...

They did not know it then, but the Pharaoh had made good time on the other side. As they at last neared the cup of the crater, and passed the place where the two diverging main corridors, each slanting downwards, met, they heard Shabako's shouts and the rapid clatter of his feet on the rock floor.

In a desperate sprint, they gained the flight of steps, stumbled up them, and came again into the glorious fresh cold air, and the slanting rays of the setting sun....

New life surged through Craig's body; but, whereas he ran across the uneven cup of the crater with fresh speed, the girl seemed suddenly to tire. He had taken the lead; now he went back, took her hand and pulled her forward, puzzled by her sudden exhaustion. He did not have time to question her, however, for the rapid beat of footsteps grew quickly very loud, and with a shout Shabako burst up into the open and caught sight of them.

The two went across the lip and slid down the slope of the volcano with all the haste they could. Shabako only twenty yards behind, his sword waving aloft and his dark face lit with a savage hate. And he was gaining—gaining steadily; and Taia was tiring more and more, and was becoming almost a dead weight on Wes Craig's supporting arm....

This was the last stretch, over almost the same ground the girl and her dead lover, Inaros, had covered twenty years before—and with the same pursuer behind. Again, by grace of the potent Kundrenaline, Shabako and the girl were enacting the desperate chase of years before, the chase that had ended in death for Inaros....

But there was a stricken look in Taia's eyes now.

"I am suddenly so tired, Divine One!" she gasped. She seemed hardly able to walk. Craig could not understand. Snatching a glance backwards, he saw that the Pharaoh, too, seemed to be strangely tiring—but gaining nevertheless....

He was practically carrying the suddenly exhausted girl when they came to the cleft in the ice from which he had dug her the day before. There was no time to get across, for before they could climb the other side Shabako would be on them. Wes gripped the handle of his blade. Here the last fight would have to be made.

"Go down the cleft, out of the way!" he told the girl rapidly. He did not have time to help her; he swung round just in time to parry a slash of Shabako's sword with his own.

Then Wes Craig stepped back and stared at his opponent, a peculiar look in his eyes.

It might have been merely from the force of his first swipe, or he might have slipped—but Shabako staggered drunkenly and barely avoided falling. With an oath, he came erect and once more charged at the American. It was easy for Wes to avoid his thrust; it would have been childishly easy to drive his blade through the Pharaoh's unguarded chest. But somehow Craig withheld his attack, and only peered

more closely at the other. He rubbed his hand across his eyes. What he was seeing was incredible.

For Shabako's face was going a ghastly white; and, as Wes watched, he groaned, tried to raise his sword arm for another blow—and could not. He staggered, legs askew, lurched crazily forward, stumbled, and at last pitched down on the ice near the cleft.

Then his great body rolled over, arms flung wide, and lay still. And the face of Pharaoh Shabako stared unseeingly up at the darkening sky....

Then, in a flash, understanding came to Wes Craig.

"Oh, God!" he cried. "The Kundrenaline!"

He had forgotten completely about the liquid he had infused into Shabako's veins. Its potency, adequate to the tremendous task of revitalizing a long-dead heart, had given out—hastened, no doubt, by the great physical exertions of the man, and made sudden by the return to the biting air of the ice fields. The liquid was only for emergency use, anyway, and supposed to

serve for a period of but hours, after which the heart was intended to carry on alone.

Shabako's heart had not been able to carry on any longer....

Wes Craig was afraid to think, afraid almost to look, to see how Taia had stood the shock. Her sudden weariness became at once all too clear to him....

Slowly he turned and looked down into the cleft. He saw her—a slender, quiet little figure, flat on the ice by the body of her slain lover.

He leaped down the slippery bank and ran to her side; knelt there, and grasped her cold white hand.

The girl's eyelids were closed, but when he touched her, they flickered, and a little sigh came from her pallid lips. Then her large black eyes, opened and looked up straight into his—and when she saw him there, she smiled.

It wrenched the man's heart. "Taia!" he cried. "Taia!"

She nodded feebly, still smiling, and her lips moved. He bent close. She was whispering something. The words came to him through a great fear.

"Take me—take me, O Divine One. Take me with thee to—to thy—heaven.... Canst thou not—take—Taia?"

With her last bit of quickly ebbing strength, she pressed his hand. Then the fingers went limp in his, and her arm dropped. And her eyelids gently closed....

Wes's jaws were clenched tightly as he folded her hands across her slim body. "If thy Pharaoh had not made me drop the vial," he murmured softly, "I would again bring thee to life, Taia, and take thee to my heaven.... Though"—with a sad smile, and relapsing into English—"Times Square would not be quite the heaven you had pictured...."

He stood up. The irony of the thing gripped him, and brought a wry smile to his tight lips. The body of Inaros, her dead lover, lay at her side; and Shabako's still figure was but feet away. Once again they were all together in death. The Kundrenaline had pierced

the black veil of their silent tryst and brought them back for a few fleeting hours; but even modern science could not stand long against the weight of twenty years.

And science would not have another chance with their still bodies. They would quickly be found there by the pursuing Egyptians, and would be gone, already decaying, when he could get back with another vial....

A growing murmur of nearby voices brought the silent man back to the present. Over the cleft in the ice he saw a string of priests and warriors speeding towards him. He sighed. It was time to go. There was much he wanted to learn about these people and their strange civilization, but there was no chance for it now. Perhaps on another trip, later.

He looked a last time on Taia, lying by her lover.

Then he scrambled up the other bank and ran towards the hillock behind which a sleek black monoplane with an eight hundred horse-power motor awaited him....

The thing that followed next was never forgotten by the people who worshipped Aten, the Sun God. It went down in legends; it was repeated and repeated, and it grew in the telling. It was awful; it was magical; it was godlike.

A great thunder sounded from behind the hillock of ice, a thunder that pulsed louder and louder, until the people fell down in awe, hardly daring to look. When they did, they saw a gleaming black form that stood on queer shafts of wood come gliding with the speed of the wind from behind the hillock. It straightened out on a stretch of snow, bellowing with a loudness that hammered their eardrums into numbness, and sped lightly along till the queer shafts of wood left the surface and the sleek black object soared up into the air.

Into the air! With frightened eyes they watched it wheel around, and then come roaring towards them. They fell flat again, and did not dare to look. The thunderous blast passed close over them, then dwindled and dwindled, until they ventured timidly to look up again.

They saw the shape ringed with sunset fire hurtling through the air, soaring up and up and up ... till it died to a speck ... till it disappeared into the face of the sun they worshipped as Aten....

A warrior spoke. His tones were low and awed but they all heard him.

"Truly," he whispered, "he was a god!..."

94 The Diamond Thunderbolt by Harold Thompson Rich

Locked in a rocket and fired into space!—such was the fate which awaited young Stoddard at the end of the diamond trail!

Aproximate word count: 11,500

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

Prof. Norman Prescott, leader of the American Kinchinjunga expedition, crept from his dog-tent perched eerily at the 26,000-foot level of this unscaled Himalayan peak, the third highest in the world. With anxious eyes he searched the appalling slopes that lifted another 2,000 feet to its majestic summit, now glistening in the radiance of sunset.

Where was young Jack Stoddard, official geologist and crack mountaineer of the party?

That morning Professor Prescott and Stoddard had set off together, from Camp No. 4, at the 22,000-foot level. Mounting laboriously but swiftly, they had reached the present eyrie by noon. There Stoddard had left the leader of the expedition and pushed on alone, to reconnoiter a razor-back ridge that looked as though it might prove the key to the summit.

But the afternoon had passed; the daring young geologist had promised to return in an hour; and now it was sunset, with still no sign of him.

Professor Prescott sighed, and a bitter expression crossed his bronzed, lined face. Just one more evidence of the cursed luck that had marked the expedition from the start!

Well he knew that he must head down at once for Camp No. 4 or risk death on this barren, wind-swept slope, and equally well he knew that to go would be to leave his brave companion to his fate, providing he had not already met it on those desolate ridges above.

Yes, and another thing he knew. The report of this

latest disaster would mean the doom of the expedition. The terrified, superstitious natives would bolt, claiming the "snow people" had struck again.

"Gods of the Mountain" they called them, those mysterious beings they alone seemed to see—evil spirits who kept guard over this towering realm, determined none should gain its ultimate heights.

Tensely Professor Prescott stood there on that narrow shelf of glacial ice, peering off into the sunset.

A hundred miles to the west, bathed in the refulgence of a thousand rainbows, rose the incredible peak of Everest, mightiest of all mountains, yet less than 1,000 feet higher than Kinchinjunga. And down, straight down those almost vertical slopes up which the expedition had toiled all summer, lay gorges choked with tropical growth. Off to the south, a scant fifty miles away, the British health station of Darjeeling flashed its white villas in the coppery glow.

An awesome spectacle!—one that human eyes had seldom if ever seen. Yet from the summit, so invitingly

near!...

Perhaps, even now, Stoddard was witnessing this incomparable sight. To push on, to join him, meant triumph. To head down, defeat. While to stay, to wait....

Grimly, Professor Prescott left his insecure perch and headed up over that razor-back ridge whence the young geologist had vanished.

As he proceeded cautiously along, drawing sharp, quick breaths in the rarefied upper atmosphere, he told himself it was ambition that was leading him on, but in his heart he knew it was not so. In his heart, he knew he was going to the rescue of his gallant companion, though the way meant death.

A hundred yards had been gained, perhaps two—each desperate foothold fraught with peril of a plunge into the yawning abysses to left and right—when suddenly he spied a figure on a twilit spur ahead.

Panting, he paused. It must be Stoddard! Yet it

seemed too small, too ghostly.

Professor Prescott waved, but even as he looked for an answering signal, the figure vanished.

"My eyes!" he muttered to himself. "I'm getting snow-blind."

Then he called aloud:

"Jack! Oh, Jack! Hello!"

Only an echo greeted the call, and he did not repeat it but pushed on silently, conserving his energy.

Was there truth after all in those persistent rumors of the natives about the snow people who inhabited the upper slopes of the Himalayas? His tired brain toyed with the idea, to be cut off sharply by the cheery call:

"Hi there, Professor! Hi-ho!"

And gazing upwards toward a jutting crag not ten rods beyond, he saw young Stoddard etched against

the darkening sky.

In a few joyous steps, Professor Prescott had reached his audacious companion.

"Thank God!" he gasped. "I'd given you up for lost."

"Why give me up for anything so unpleasant?" was the genial reply. "I've just been enjoying the view."

"Then—then you reached the top?" with a quick intake of breath.

"Well, not exactly, but I feel on top of the world, just the same."

The professor's spirits fell.

"Then I can't see—"

"Of course you can't see!" interrupted Stoddard. "But look at this!"

As he spoke, he drew from a pocket of his leather jacket something that caught the last light of the

dying day and refracted it with weird brilliance.

Professor Prescott blinked.

"Well?"

"A diamond. As big as your fist! And here's another!"

His left hand reached into his jacket and produced a second sparkling gem.

"But—but I don't understand—"

"Granted. But you will, when I tell you I've found the Diamond Thunderbolt!"

The professor gave a shrug of scorn.

"And no doubt you've seen the snow people and have had a perfect afternoon, while—"

"No, I haven't seen any snow people, but I've had a perfect afternoon, all right! As I said, I've found the Diamond Thunderbolt; and here are a couple of chips, picked up from around the edge."

So saying, Stoddard extended his two specimens toward Professor Prescott, who disdained at first to touch them.

"Nothing but quartz!" was the deprecating comment. "The snow has affected your eyesight, as it has my own."

"I'll say it's affected yours, if you don't recognize diamonds when you see them. But wait till I show you the old Thunderbolt itself! It's—"

"More quartz!" brusquely. "Be sensible, Jack. This Diamond Thunderbolt thing is a pure myth, like the snow people business. Just because this section of India is known as The Land of the Diamond Thunderbolt you think you're going to find some precious meteor or other, whereas the term applies merely to the Lama's scepter."

"Granted it does,"—a little impatiently—"but did it ever occur to you that where there's smoke, there's fire? Meteor is the word! One struck here once—a diamond meteor!—and I've found it. Take a look at

these two specimens and see what you think."

Whereupon Professor Prescott accepted the glinting gems from his young friend—to gasp a moment later, as he held them tremblingly:

"Good Lord—they're diamonds, to be sure! Where did you find them?"

Stoddard hesitated before replying.

"Not far from here," he said at length, moving off.

"Come, I'll show you."

But the professor stood firm on their narrow ledge.

"You must be crazy!" he exclaimed. "We'll have trouble enough now, getting back. It's practically dark already."

"Then what's the odds?" retorted the young geologist.

"We've got all night."

"But our friends at Camp No. 4. Even now, they must

think we are lost."

"Then further thought won't kill them. Besides, we'll be back before morning—and they can't send out a relief party sooner."

"But any moment a storm may come up. You know what that would mean."

"Does it look likely?" scoffed Stoddard, waving his hand aloft. "See—there's the moon! She'll be our guide."

Professor Prescott looked, saw a slender shallop charting her course among the stars, and for a moment was tempted. But speedily his responsibilities reasserted themselves.

"No, I can't do it," he said with finality. "I owe it to the expedition to return as soon as possible. Furthermore, there's the matter of the authorities. We assured the British we would adhere strictly to our one purpose—to scale Kinchinjunga."

"A mere formality."

"No—a definite order from the Lamas. They closed Mt. Everest, after the last expedition, you will recall. The Lama's scepter is veritably a diamond thunderbolt of power in this region."

Whereupon Stoddard's patience snapped.

"Listen!" he said. "I hurried away because I knew you'd be anxious, but I'm going back, if I have to—"

"And I say you're not!" The professor's patience, too, had snapped. "I'm not going with you, and you're not going back alone! As the leader of this expedition, I forbid it!"

The younger man laughed raspingly, as he shook off the hand that clasped his arm, and for a moment it looked as though the two would fight, there on that dizzy ledge above the world.

Then Stoddard got control of himself.

"Sorry!" he said. "I see I've got to tell you something, Professor. You think I'm merely the geologist of this expedition, but in fact I'm a secret service man from Washington, on the trail of the biggest diamond-smuggling plot in history—and here is where the trail ends!"

Professor Prescott's astonishment at these words was profound. He stood there blinking up at Stoddard, scarcely believing he had heard aright.

"You—you say you are—?"

"A detective, if you want. Anyway, if you've read the papers, you must know that for the past year or more the diamond markets of the world have been flooded with singularly perfect stones."

"Yes, I recall reading about that. They were thought to be synthetic, were they not?"

"By certain imaginative newspaper reporters, not by the experts, for under the microscope they revealed the invariable characteristics of diamonds formed by

nature—the tiny flaws and imperfections no artificial means could duplicate."

"But didn't I read something, too, about some anonymous Indian rajah who was thought to be raising money by disposing of his jewels?"

"More newspaper rubbish! For one thing, British secret service men traced the rumor down and satisfied themselves there wasn't a rajah in India unloading any diamonds. For another; no rajah could possibly have the wealth involved. Why, do you know that since this plot unfolded, over five million carats' worth have made their appearance—and that means something like a billion dollars."

"Whew!" whistled the professor.

"Whew is right!" his companion agreed. "And not only have the diamond markets of the world been disorganized by this mysterious influx, but the countries involved have lost millions of dollars in revenue, due to the fact that the gems have been smuggled in without payment of duty."

"But surely, my dear fellow, you don't connect this gigantic plot with your discovery of—whatever it is you have discovered?"

"A diamond as big as a house! That's what I've discovered! And I most surely do connect the plot with it. Did you ever have a hunch, Professor? Well, I had one—and it's worked out!"

"You leave me more in the dark momentarily!" declared the older man, glancing around as though to give his words a double meaning. "What was your hunch, and how did it come to lead you here?"

Whereupon Stoddard told him, swiftly, for there was no time to lose.

When first assigned to the case, he said, he had been as baffled as anyone. But as he had studied the problem, one outstanding fact had given him the clue. All the gem experts agreed that the mysterious flood of smuggled stones was of Indian origin, being of the first water and of remarkable fire—in other words, of the finest transparency and brilliance.

Therefore, since they were genuine and were seemingly coming from India, Stoddard had concentrated his attention on this country, seeking their exact source. Investigation showed that there were no mines within its borders capable of producing anything like the quantity that was inundating the market.

But—and here was where the hunch came in—there was a district in the Sikkim Himalayas of Bengal whose capital was Darjeeling—Land of the Diamond Thunderbolt. Why had it been called that? Was there some legend back of it?

There was, he had learned. For though in modern times the phrase had come to apply merely to the Lama's scepter, as Professor Prescott had pointed out, originally it had carried another meaning—for legend said that once a diamond meteor had fallen on the mighty slopes of Kinchinjunga.

That had been enough for Stoddard. He had followed his hunch, had got himself attached to the American Kinchinjunga expedition—

"And that's why I'm here, and all about it," he finished. "Now, then, are you coming back with me and have a look at my Diamond Thunderbolt, or am I going back alone?"

A long moment the professor debated, before replying.

"Yes, I'll come with you," he said at length, extending his hand. "Forgive me, Jack. I didn't know, or—"

"Forget it," said Stoddard shaking. "How the devil could you, till I told you? But just one thing. Mum's the word—right?"

"Right!"

"And one thing more. It may be—well, a one-way trip."

"Forget it."

"O. K., Professor."

With a last warm handclasp, leaving them joined in a new bond of friendship, the two men moved on over that narrow, moonlit ridge across the top of the world.

It was a desperate trail, Professor Prescott realized after scarcely a dozen steps. The ridge grew narrower, sheerer, and in places they had to straddle it, legs dangling precariously to left and right.

Admiration for his gallant companion mounted in the professor's pounding heart, as they struggled on. Only to picture anyone eager to return such a perilous way, after once getting safely back!

Other thoughts occupied his mind, too, during the next half-hour. More than once he could have sworn he saw small, ghostly figures on the ridge ahead. But he made no mention of it, for Stoddard didn't seem to see them.

Now they gained the far end of that hazardous ridge, where a sloping shelf of jagged rock offered a somewhat more secure footing. Along this they proceeded laterally for some distance.

Suddenly Stoddard paused and called out:

"Ah—there we are!" He indicated a steep pocket to the left. "Have a look down there, Professor, and tell me what you see."

Prescott lowered his eyes to the depths below, to draw back with a gasp—for what he saw was a vast phosphorescent glow, like a fallen star.

"What—what is it?" he cried, in an awed voice.

And back came the ringing reply:

"The Diamond Thunderbolt!"

"But the radiance of the thing! It couldn't reflect that much light from the moon!"

"No, and it doesn't. But there's nothing uncanny about it. Just what I expected the thing would look like at night. But come on, Professor. You haven't seen the half of it!"

The way led down the jagged, shelving slope, now, and the descent was too precarious for further comment.

Ten minutes passed—fifteen, possibly—when they reached a sheltered, snowless arena where titanic forces had clashed at some remote age. Fragments of splintered rock lay strewn in wild confusion—and among them, glinting in the moonlight, were bright crystals.

Picking up one, Stoddard said laughingly:

"One of Mother Nature's trinkets worth half a million or so!"

Professor Prescott blinked at it a moment, almost in disbelief, then stooped and picked up one for himself—a diamond that would have made the Kohinoor look like a pebble.

There was no doubting its genuineness. Even in the moonlight, it flashed and burned like a thing afire.

But as the professor turned his eyes at last from its dazzling facets, they failed him again—or so he thought—for half hidden behind a jutting crag loomed a huge cylindrical object, seemingly of metal.

For the space of two breaths, he stared speechless, then gasped:

"Good Lord! What's that?"



Following his gaze, Stoddard saw it too.

"God knows!" he muttered, in a tense voice. "It wasn't there this afternoon. Let's have a look at it."

Cautiously, not knowing what to expect, they advanced toward the singular phenomenon.

Nearing, they saw that it was a mechanism some twenty feet at the base and sixty or more feet high, pointed at the top.

"A rocket!" declared Professor Prescott. "Though I've never seen anything larger than a laboratory model, I'll gamble that's what it is."

"And I'll gamble you're right!" exclaimed Stoddard. "And one capable of carrying passengers, would you say?"

"Fully."

"Then I think we have solved the mystery of how these diamonds reach the market. The question now is, who's back of this thing? And since our position here probably isn't any too healthy—"

He broke off and drew his automatic, as a small, ghostly figure appeared—seemingly from nowhere.

The professor saw it, too—saw it followed by another, and another—and now he knew his eyesight had not failed him back on that wind-swept slope above, either, for these were actual creatures, incredible as they seemed.

The snow people?

He did not know—had no time to find out—for with a rush, the strange beings were all around them.

Stoddard levelled his pistol and called on them to halt, but they came on—scores, hundreds now, seeming to pour out of some unseen aperture of the earth.

Once or twice he fired, over their heads, but it failed to halt them. They closed in, jabbering shrilly.

But though their words were a babel, their actions were plain enough. Swarming up, they overpowered

the explorers by sheer numbers, and herded them with jabs of sharp, tiny knives toward a cavern mouth that opened presently amid those eery crags.

Led underground, they found themselves proceeding along a frosty passage lit every few yards by a great chunk of diamond. Their dim glow seemed to be refracted from some central point beyond.

This point they soon reached—a great, vaulted chamber whose brilliance was at first dazzling.

Its source, after the first moment or so, was obvious. It was coming from the roof, which was one vast diamond.

"You see where we are?" whispered Stoddard. "Under the Diamond Thunderbolt! These people have tunneled beneath the meteor. Or else—"

"Their tunnel was already there, when the meteor fell," finished Professor Prescott. "But can it be possible such creatures could have produced that rocket?"

"I'm inclined to think anything is possible, now! But I'm sorry I dragged you into this, Professor. I—"

"Forget it! We're here and we'll face it together, whatever it is."

"You're a game sport!" Stoddard gripped the older man's hand. "We'll face it—and lick it!"

Further talk was interrupted by a stir among their captors. The ranks parted—and into that dazzling chamber stepped a tall, bearded personage whose aristocratic features and haughty bearing suggested a Russian of the old regime.

He strode toward them, smiling sardonically.

"Greetings, my friends! Nice of you to drop in on me while in the neighborhood." His English was suave, precise. "Professor Norman Prescott, leader of the American Kinchinjunga expedition, I believe." He paused and lifted inquiring eyebrows to his other guest. "And—?"

"Dr. John Stoddard, our geologist," came the answer stiffly. "And you, sir?"

"A fellow professor, you might say. Prince Ivan Krassnov. You have heard of me, perhaps?"

Prescott had indeed. One of Russia's most brilliant and erratic scientists under the czar, the man had been permitted to continue his work for the Soviets, developing among other inventions, a rocket reported to be capable of carrying passengers. But some two years ago he and his rocket had vanished in the course of a test flight from Moscow, and the natural conclusion was that he had either perished in the sea or shot off the earth altogether, since no trace of the unique mechanism was ever found.

"Yes, I have heard of you," said the professor, recalling this sensational story that had occupied the front pages of the world's press for days. "And so it turns out that your rocket didn't come to grief."

"Not exactly—though as you can see, it landed me in rather an inaccessible spot," was the reply. "But quite

an interesting one! I was well satisfied to let the papers report me missing. You can understand, yes?"

"I think I can, that part of it." While as for Stoddard, he was beginning to understand a great deal. "But these curious creatures?" he said, indicating the whispering, pigmy host that filled the cavern. "You found them here?"

"They found me, rather!" corrected the prince. "But we get on quite well together. They consider me a god, you see, since I, too, came out of the sky in a thunderbolt, as their great diamond once did, according to their legends."

"But who are they? What is their origin? Why are they so small, so pale?"

"Natural questions, Professor, but not so easy to answer. Who they are I cannot say, save that they are the snow people of native superstition. Their origin? It is lost in antiquity. Perhaps they are the remnants of some Tibetan tribe driven into the mountains by enemies, thousands of years ago. While as for their

stature, their pallor—these no doubt are the result of the furtive underground life they lead."

He paused, waited politely, as though for further questions, but neither spoke. Now that the main mystery was solved, the one question uppermost in both their minds was what this suave, inscrutable nobleman was going to do with them—and that question neither cared to ask, fearful of what the answer might be.

Finally Prince Krassnov spoke again.

"What, gentlemen—you have no further curiosity about me? How unflattering! I thought perhaps you might want to know why I have chosen to maintain my headquarters here on Kinchinjunga, the past two years, and how I have been occupying my time. But I hold no resentment. I shall tell you, so that you will be prepared for what I am going to propose."

He turned and addressed the pigmy host in what must have been their own tongue. Then, facing his guests again, he said:

"Now, come. Let us retire to my private study, where we shall have more leisure."

They followed him from that dazzling chamber and proceeded on down the cavern to a fork that ended about twenty paces further in a massive steel-bound door.

There he paused and twirled a knob like the dial of a safe. After a moment there came a click, as of tumblers meshing, and a tug on the knob swung the door open.

The prince bowed.

"Step into my little apartment," he said.

They entered, to find themselves in a large oblong room furnished in Slavic luxury.

As they crossed a rich Oriental rug spread over the threshold, a musical gong sounded somewhere, and almost instantly two enormous Cossacks sprang into view, to bar their way with rifles.

"My bodyguard," apologized Krassnov, shutting the door. "They are quite harmless, except to intruders. Just one of the little precautions that make life safer."

He spoke to the men in Russian and they withdrew.

Then he advanced to a divan beside a teakwood table on which stood a large copper samovar. Dropping down, he motioned for them to take seats beside him.

"You will have tea, my friends? Or perhaps you would prefer whiskey and soda?"

They chose the latter, since their recent exertions seemed to have warranted it, and their host tinkled a silver bell, bringing a Chinese boy beaming and salaaming.

A few words to him and the samovar was lit; then he hurried off on padding feet, to return with miraculous speed, bearing not only the whiskey and soda but a platter heaped with exotic cakes, cubed sandwiches of caviar and spiced fish, together with a profusion of other delicacies—doubly welcome to men who had

toiled all day on a mountain peak, with nothing but chocolate to sustain them.

And while they drank and ate, Prince Krassnov told his story—a story whose very first words were an admission that he was the head of the great diamond-smuggling plot Stoddard had set out to trace down.

It was a story as dramatic and romantic as it was unscrupulous.

Finding himself and the crew of the rocket marooned on the upper slopes of this mighty mountain, in the midst of an incalculable wealth, he had set about at once to capitalize their astounding discovery.

First he had made certain adjustments in the mechanism of his apparatus—which fortunately had not been injured by its forced landing—and then he had taken off with specimens of the treasure, bringing the craft down this time with precision in the midst of his ancestral estates near Baku, in the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains.

This vast property the Bolsheviks had not confiscated, partly because of its remoteness, no doubt, and partly because of the prince's services to the Soviet Republic. At any rate, it was here he had developed in secret the details of his amazing plot—a plot that had as its aim not only his own enrichment but the rehabilitation of all the Russian nobles.

Once they had heard his story of the Diamond Thunderbolt and seen the specimens he showed them, many had eagerly joined the plot, with the result that an international ring had been formed for disposal of the gems.

His plans perfected, Prince Krassnov had then returned to Kinchinjunga with his rocket, since when the mysterious flood of those perfect diamonds into the jewel markets of the world had begun.

"So you see, my friends," he smiled, "that is what you Americans would call my 'little game'—a game your chance discovery has rather jeopardized, you must admit."

Professor Prescott could well realize this, but at a glance from Stoddard he declined to admit it.

"A very ingenious game!" he said. "But where do the Lamas figure in this? Surely they must know of the presence of this meteor within their kingdom."

"No doubt they do," the prince conceded. "This is why they are so reluctant to have foreigners enter their domain. At one time, I am satisfied, they knew its exact location and drew many of their own gems from that source. But in recent times the snow people have guarded their secret well. The Lamas are as terrified of them as the natives—and with better reason!"

He did not mention what the reason was, but there was something ominous in his tone.

But to get on with my story, friends. I am not telling you all this merely to satisfy your curiosity. I have what you call a motive in my madness!"

Madness was right, thought Stoddard. The man was dangerously, criminally mad.

"My motive is simply this," he went on. "You have chanced upon my little nest-egg, and consequently I have either to let you in on the deal or—"

Krassnov paused; shrugged.

"But why talk of anything unpleasant, when there is wealth enough here for all? What I propose, briefly, is that you join me."

They knew it was coming, but they winced, nevertheless.

"Oh, don't be premature!" he exclaimed, a little nettled. "Hear me out. What is good enough for me and my fellow nobles of Imperial Russia is surely good enough for poor, under-paid professors of democratic America. Listen, friends—I am generous. Join me and we will make millionaires out of all of you. Every professor in your country shall be a little czar. It will be, to use the old phrase, a triumph of the intellect."

Beyond a doubt, the man was mad; yet his madness was vast, dizzying. Though neither was tempted, they

were both rendered speechless for a moment. It was like standing on a mountain top and being shown the countries and the glories of the world—like standing on the top of Kinchinjunga, thought Prescott.

"But you assume we are all Bolsheviks, like yourself, we professors," he said, struggling for calm words.

"Bolsheviks!" snorted the prince. "I spit on them! You think I, a nobleman, am interested in the masses? Cattle—swine! I plan only for the day when we who are worthy rule again, and this that I have told you is my plan. You can, as you Americans so coarsely say, either take it or leave it."

A tension hung in the air, as his words echoed into silence. The man had revealed himself.

"And suppose we leave it?" asked the professor, restraining his irritation as best he could. "What then?"

"Then I am afraid—ah—unpleasant consequences would result," was the bland answer. "Surely you

realize that I could not let you and young Dr. Stoddard rejoin your expedition with this story to report."

They realized it quite well.

"But suppose we agree not to report it?" said Professor Prescott.

"Not to doubt your honesty of intention," replied Krassnov sharply. "I would refuse to accept such an agreement."

"Then I see nothing else but to decline your kind proposal," said Stoddard, before the professor could formulate further words. "What do you propose to do—murder us?"

"Nothing so personal," said the prince, with his sardonic smile. "I shall merely turn you over to my little subjects. They no doubt will deal with you as your merits warrant."

Whereupon he pressed a button under that elaborate

teakwood table. The musical gong they had heard before sounded again, and the prince's two Cossack retainers reappeared.

He addressed them briefly in Russian, adding to his guests:

"Adieu, friends! If you change your minds, you have only to speak. You will be understood, and I shall be gratified."

And without further words, they were led from that ornate apartment.

Taken back to the dazzling chamber under the meteor, they were turned over to the pigmies.

A powwow resulted, but it was brief. The two captives were bound fast in a curious ceremonial pit near the center of the room. Then the midget horde withdrew, leaving them alone there under that eery glow.

"Now what the devil will be the next step?" queried Stoddard, when the last of the pigmies had gone.

Professor Prescott considered for a moment, before replying.

"I don't think there will be any next step, except our cremation," he said at length.

"Cremation?" gasped his young friend. "What do you mean, cremation?"

Another pause, then:

"Just this. Don't you see where we are? Right under the Thunderbolt! Well?"

"Well what?"

"Simple enough, Jack." The professor's tone was grave. "When dawn comes, and the rising sun strikes that—"

"Good God!" Stoddard suddenly understood. "Why, we'll be cooked alive—frizzled!"

It was only too true. Even now, the pale rays of the

moon, concentrated by the myriad facets of that monumental diamond, were beginning to focus on them a warmth that was uncomfortable. And by morning—!

The two men crouched there silent, realizing their desperate plight. They must escape, before the sun rose. But how?

Studying their bonds, they discovered that they were of rawhide of some sort, obviously from the hides of animals these strange people caught on the lower slopes somewhere. But though they strained and twisted, they could not stretch them, the leather evidently having been cured to a marvelous toughness in these high altitudes.

Precious minutes ticked by as they struggled there, but they were unable to extricate themselves.

But before the end of a half-hour, Stoddard managed to free one arm, and reaching into his jacket he drew forth a small, compact metal object—his cigarette lighter.

Twirling the wheel, while Professor Prescott held his breath, he succeeded in kindling a flame on its tiny wick.

If only he could reach the thongs with it! If only he could burn them through and free himself and the professor before any of the pigmies re-entered that lethal chamber!

Wrenching around now, he applied the flame to his left wrist, which was still bound. As the living fire touched his flesh, he winced with pain, but almost anything was better than the grisly fate that threatened.

Slowly, a little at a time, he endured the torture, straining at each application to see if the thongs would yield.

"Here, let me try it once!" called out Professor Prescott, as he cried aloud with the agony of the ordeal.

"No. I'll get it!" Stoddard gritted his teeth, continued.

"There! I think my hand is free!" He struggled. "Yes. Now wait!"

Replacing his cigarette lighter in his pocket, he drew his blistered wrist from its smouldering bonds and struggled feverishly now to undo the lashes about his feet.

Five minutes of that and suddenly he flung them off and stood up.

"Now! Now then, Professor. I'll have you loose in a jiffy!"

Bending over his fettered companion, he worked with frantic haste to untie the rawhide bonds.

Another five minutes and they were both free.

Professor Prescott stood up and stretched.

"Thank God for small favors!" he exclaimed. "But you, Jack? You must be burned cruelly.

"Forget it!" Stoddard was already wrapping a handkerchief around his wrist. "Now let's see about getting out of here. These little rats all seem to be asleep, and Lord knows where that maniac Krassnov is. Perhaps we can make it. At any rate, we'll give them a run for their money!"

As he spoke, he drew his automatic.

Silently, stealthily, they left that glittering chamber and proceeded down the cavern toward what seemed to be the entrance, guided by their remembrance of the way they had come.

A hundred yards or more they made, seeing no sign of their captors, when suddenly a musical gong rang out.

"We've stepped on one of Krassnov's infernal signals!" cried Stoddard, above the din. "Now there'll be hell to pay!"

And "hell to pay" there was, almost instantly—for before they had taken ten more steps, the cavern

ahead was full of small, ghostly figures, jabbering in their shrill voices.

Indifferent now of what he did, their lives at stake, Stoddard blazed away with his automatic, sweeping it from side to side of the stony walls as he fired.

As the shots crashed out, the jabbers turned to shrieks of terror. Several of the pigmies fell. The rest broke their ranks and shrank into the shadows.

"Run!" yelled Stoddard, slipping a new clip into his pistol.

The professor needed no invitation. Gathering his long legs he sped after the younger man, and together they burst from the mouth of the cavern.

Outside, in the dazzle of moonlight, they paused for an instant.

"This way!" called Stoddard, racing toward that splintered arena.

They gained it and lunged across it to the shelving slope that reached upward to the narrow, perilous ridge whence they had come.

As they proceeded, the pigmy horde following with incredible swiftness, Stoddard wheeled and fired time and again—and now his shots were answered by the reports of rifles.

"Krassnov and his Cossacks!" he muttered. "Well, we'll give them our heels, unless they hit us."

"And Russians are notoriously bad shots, I understand," panted the professor.

At any rate, they reached the slope and struggled upward toward the ridge, putting themselves presently out of range behind the jagged rocks that loomed on every side.

But just as they were congratulating themselves on their escape, came a dull, reverberating explosion—and as they clung to their insecure footholds, a volcano of snow and ice rose ahead. Thousands of

tons of debris avalanched into the chasm below.

Stunned, deafened, they looked around.

Down in that pocket where the Thunderbolt had so recently gleamed was one vast chaos, and above, where that razor-back ridge had led across the intervening chasms to safety, was a dazzling void.

To both came the same thought, but Stoddard expressed it first.

"Krassnov—he's dynamited the ridge!" he gasped.

"Then we—we'll never get back now!" echoed Professor Prescott.

"No, but they'll never get us here!"

"Scant comfort, though, when we're pinioned here like a couple of birds with their wings clipped."

"Right; but let's see. Let's figure. We're better off than we were. And what was it Napoleon once said: 'When

you can't retreat, advance.' So suppose we—"

"But listen!"

Stoddard heard. It was the sound of rifle shots. And looking down, he saw a feverish activity surrounding the rocket. Myriads of the pigmies were swarming upon it, while a handful of Cossacks were holding them off.

"Something doing down there, all right!" he muttered. "Looks to me like—why, sure I've got it! That madman has overshot himself, for once! He's buried their precious meteor, in blowing up our ridge, and they've turned on him!"

"I think you're right," agreed Professor Prescott. "Suppose we advance as you say. It looks like a chance."

"Right," said Stoddard.

Slowly, cautiously, they returned down the slope.

When within a hundred yards, they knew they had sized up the situation correctly. With frantic speed, Krassnov was supervising the shoveling out of his rocket from amid the debris; was directing its loading, while the free members of his crew held off the enraged natives who were obstructing them.

Descending even more cautiously now, they neared the scene of activity.

"My plan is this—to get aboard and find out where they're going!" said Stoddard, through shut teeth. "What do you say?"

"Lead on!" said the professor.

So they continued down, neared the resting-place of that strange craft, and, under shelter of the moonlight shadows, stole through the confused ranks surrounding it and crept aboard.

Stowing themselves into the first likely niche that offered—a narrow cubicle behind a flight of metal stairs—they waited, scarcely daring to breathe for

fear of being discovered.

Fifteen minutes passed, a half-hour, when suddenly sounded a rasping of doors that told them the rocket was being sealed.

Then came a roar, as of some mighty blast beating down upon the frozen earth, followed by a lifting, rushing sensation—and they were flung violently to the flooring.

The pressure ceased in a moment, however, to be supplanted by a buoyant, exhilarating sense of flight. It increased, and they judged they must be traveling at great speed.

Glancing at the luminous dial of his watch, Professor Prescott saw that it was a quarter to ten.

"Well, we're off!" he whispered. "And where, would you guess, are we headed?"

"I wouldn't guess," Stoddard whispered back. "From the way we're riding, it might be Mars! We must be

making hundreds of miles an hour."

"Or thousands! Who knows?"

They crouched there in their cramped niche, scarcely even whispering now, as the tense minutes passed.

Suddenly the motion changed. They seemed to be dropping.

Another moment or two, and with a slight jar the rocket came to rest.

"Well, we're here, wherever it is," said Stoddard, stirring.

"Yes, undoubtedly," the professor agreed. "And the next move?"

"I think we'll let them make that."

They were not long in doing so. There came the sound of doors rasping open, of footsteps echoing on metal stairs and corridors. Once a giant Cossack passed

within four feet of them. But at length, all was silent within the rocket.

"Now, then, suppose we have a look around," said Stoddard, stepping out.

"Right," agreed his companion, following. "I'll admit I am mildly curious to know what corner of the earth we've been transported to."

They proceeded down the dim-lit corridor the way they had come, descended a flight of stairs and headed along another corridor—to pause suddenly and gasp with astonishment. For through the door whence they had entered the rocket poured a flood of sunshine.

Stoddard stared at it a moment incredulously, and then glanced at his watch.

"Ten o'clock, I make it!" he muttered. "Am I crazy, or what?"

"No, I hardly think so," smiled Professor Prescott,

recovering from his own surprise. "It is merely that we are in some part of the world quite a few thousand miles removed from India. Back on Kinchinjunga, it is still ten o'clock at night, but here, it is quite obviously daytime."

"That must be the explanation," Stoddard agreed. "But it certainly gave me a start at first!"

Approaching the door, followed by the professor, he peered cautiously out, to confront a desolate stretch of scrubby growth, hemmed in by a background of rugged mountains.

"Now where the devil would you say we are?" he demanded, gazing around perplexedly.

"Either in the United States or in Mexico," was the astonishing reply.

"But how can you say that?"

"Because it must be some place approximately twelve hours distant from India in time, to judge from the

sun, which is not far past the meridian."

"But why not Australia, for instance?"

"Because Australia is too far. It would be three o'clock tomorrow morning there, since it is ten o'clock last night now in India."

Stoddard pondered this a minute, then admitted its correctness.

"All right, then. Assuming that we are somewhere on the North American continent, the next thing is to give Krassnov the slip; otherwise it won't be big enough for all of us!"

And that Professor Prescott conceded readily enough.

But before making any further move, they looked over their surroundings carefully, to satisfy themselves none of their late captors were in view.

"They're evidently somewhere on the other side of the rocket," Stoddard concluded at length. "So let's make

a break for it while we've got the chance."

"Lead the way!" said the professor.

"O. K., here we go!"

And, stepping through the door, they dropped to the ground and raced off under the glare of the burning sun toward the rugged mountains that loomed ahead.

For a hundred yards or so they were able to keep the rocket between themselves and the Russians but soon the ground sloped up to such an extent that they realized they must be in full view.

Dropping behind the scant shelter of a scraggly tree, they turned and glanced down—and there, beyond the rocket, they could now see a group of men standing around outside a small wooden shack, shouting and gesticulating in their direction.

"Damn it, they've seen us!" muttered Stoddard.

"But why don't they come after us?" queried Professor

Prescott.

The answer came even as he spoke, for out of the shack rushed the tall figure of the prince, in his hand a pair of binoculars which he raised to his eyes.

Whether or not he spotted them, an instant later he turned and uttered a command, and two huge Cossacks sprang to the pursuit.

"There's nothing to do now but run for it!" cried Stoddard, leaping to his feet.

The professor followed and they plunged on up the slope, bullets from their pursuers' pistols and the rifles of those below kicking up the dust around them. But either because the aim was bad or the targets difficult, they escaped unscathed.

As for Stoddard, he wasted no time in firing back.

"Once we get in those mountains, we're safe!" he gasped, as they struggled on. "How are you, Professor—all right?"

"No holes in my skin so far!" came the panting answer.

Five desperate, dodging minutes passed.

Glancing over their shoulders, they saw that the heavy, stolid Cossacks were losing ground. And ahead, tauntingly near now, loomed a thickly-wooded slope that meant the beginning of big timber—and safety.

Another five minutes—each second an hour—and they had gained it.

But there was no pausing yet, they could hear the Cossacks crashing on like determined blood-hounds behind.

"No need to climb any more!" exclaimed Stoddard, half breathless. "We'll edge along, keep in the trees, and try to throw them off."

The older man said nothing; merely gritted his teeth. This climb had told on him more than anything he had

experienced on the cruel slopes of Kinchinjunga.

As they struggled along now, sometimes it seemed that they had thrown their pursuers off the trail, or completely outdistanced them, but always a moment later they would hear again the crunch of the Cossacks' boots on the dry undergrowth.

So the grim flight continued, mile after heart-tearing mile, and Stoddard was beginning to realize that the professor couldn't keep on much longer—had just about decided to stop and shoot it out with their pursuers—when suddenly there came a sound that brought new hope to him.

"Did you hear that?" he gasped, pausing.

"It—sounded like—a car!" panted his companion.

"Right. And that means there must be a road through here somewhere! But where?"

"Listen." Professor Prescott pointed to the left. "The sound seems to be coming from over there."

And sure enough, from the left came a wheezing grind of a car making a heavy grade.

"Near, too," decided Stoddard. "Come on—let's go! We've got to head it off. It's our only hope, except—"

With relief, he shoved his automatic back into its holster and led the way in the direction of the now rapidly nearing car.

A hundred yards they had made, up a slight rise, when there spread before them a rutted mountain road, and on it, in full view, was a laboring Ford of ancient vintage.

Over the wheel hovered a lanky, leathery native, and beside him sat a small, plump woman who looked as though she might be his wife.

They were almost to the top of the hill when Stoddard hailed them.

"Say!" he said. "Give us a ride, will you? We're lost."

"Keep on, Henry!" he heard the woman urge. "I don't like the looks of 'em."

Americans! Well, thought Stoddard, they were in the United States, anyway. That was something. And he didn't exactly blame the good woman for her suspicions. They must look pretty wild, at that, with their two-day beards and tattered clothes.

"Sorry," spoke up Henry. "Missus says no. She knows best. 'Sides, it ain't fur to Martin's Bluff. You kin make it in an hour."

"But say, wait a minute!" They were running along beside the wheezing car now. "We've got to get there in a hurry. We'll pay you."

Henry pricked up his ears at this, but his wife shook her head.

"Keep on!" she urged. "They may be bandits!"

Thereupon Stoddard drew his automatic, for there was no more time to argue.

"Stop!" he commanded. "You'll take us, understand? I'll pay you well!"

"See, I was right!" screamed the woman. "Bandits! Bandits! Oh, Henry—save me!"

Wildly she clung to him, as Stoddard mounted the running-board, but before he could make another move, Professor Prescott gasped out:

"The Cossacks! Quick!"

And jumping down, he wheeled to face the two leering Russians, not forty feet down the road. Pistols levelled, they were advancing stolidly.

Stoddard half-raised his own weapon, then turned to see if the car was within range of the return fire it would bring. It was—but not for long.

With a furious chattering of bands, as Henry gave it the gas, the decrepit vehicle gained the top of the hill and disappeared from view down the far slope, and the last thing he saw of it was a dusty plate flapping

under its tail-light.

It was a Texas license!

Then, turning back, he lifted his automatic; but it was too late. The Cossacks were on them.

In answer to a guttural command, he dropped the weapon and raised his hands, as the professor had already done.

Two hours later, they were back at the rocket.

Led into the shack—which was furnished inside like an Oriental hunting-lodge—they were confronted at once by Prince Krassnov.

Though his aristocratic features were immobile, it was obvious that he was in no amiable frame of mind.

"So, my friends!" he exclaimed. "I leave you in India, and meet you again in America, all within a matter of hours. It is but an example of our modern progress, is it not?"

They made no reply.

"Ha! You are not sociable, after enjoying my hospitality, my transportation? Then suppose we—as you Americans so quaintly say—call a spade a spade! I gave you your chance. You declined it. And what is the result? My beautiful Diamond Thunderbolt, my immeasurable treasure, is buried forever."

"Through no fault of ours!" put in Stoddard.

"But buried nevertheless, and my adopted kingdom in revolt. Yet do not think I mourn too much, my friends. Though the game is what you call up, my plans shall go on. Here and elsewhere in the world, where we have sub-headquarters, are billions of dollars' worth of diamonds—supplies for years ahead. We shall not suffer. But you—Professor Prescott and Doctor Stoddard—I have a very interesting fate in store for you. How would you care to make a little scientific expedition to Mars, say?"

"Mars?" gasped the professor.

"Yes, or Venus, or even Jupiter, not to mention the moon! Or how about the sun? That would be an interesting sphere for exploration."

"We don't know what you're talking about," said Stoddard growing nettled. "Why mince matters? Call a spade a spade, if you're going to! What do you propose to do with us, now that you have us in your power?"

The prince paused, drew forth a long Russian cigarette from an exquisite platinum case.

"I propose," he smiled, when he had lit it, "to turn over my rocket to you, my fellow scientists, since I shall have no further use for it and it might be embarrassing to be found with it in my possession."

And the way he proposed to turn it over to them, as they had already suspected, was to lock them in it and fire it off into space.

Within the hour, the man's diabolical plan had been put into operation.

Led to the rocket, the luckless pair were locked within a small metal room somewhere within its recesses. There sounded again the peculiar rasping that told them its doors were being sealed. And then came the roar of that mighty exhaust beating down.

There followed the lifting, rushing sensation they had experienced before, and again they were flung violently to the flooring by the force of the upward impulse.

When the pressure slacked, they staggered to their feet and groped around the dark, stuffy little room.

"Well, this is the end, I guess," sighed Professor Prescott. "I had never thought," with a grim attempt at humor, "that I would meet quite such a scientific fate as this!"

"Nor had I!" Stoddard agreed. "But I'm not quite ready to cash in my checks yet. The game isn't over!" He was pacing around the room, knocking on the metal walls with something that gave back a strident ring. "Have you any idea what composition this stuff

is?"

The professor rapped on one of the panels; felt of it.

"Aluminum, I would say."

"Nothing so lucky! If it were, I could cut it like cheese. But duralumin, probably, a very light, strong alloy; and what I have here is a hunting knife with a can-opener on one end! If I'm not mistaken, we'll be out of this sardine box before long."

Whereupon he applied himself to the thin metal wall of their cell, working determinedly, while Professor Prescott held his cigarette lighter for a torch.

"You see, duralumin yields to heat, like aluminum," he exclaimed, as finally his knife thrust through. "Now then, let's get the can opener working."

The progress was slow but sure. Within an hour, he had cut out a jagged section some two feet square, through which they squeezed into an equally dark corridor.

"Now then!" Stoddard's mood was exultant. "There must be switches around here somewhere. There were lights, I remember, so let's find them. Once we get a little light on the subject—"

"Here!" called the professor, who had groped down the corridor with the cigarette lighter. "How's that?"

As he pressed a switch, a row of small bulbs glowed overhead.

"Fine!" was the answer. "Now let's see if we can find the engine-room, or whatever they call it."

Jubilant now, they continued on down the corridor, which ended in a flight of stairs.

"I fancy it must be below," said Professor Prescott. "From what I have seen of experimental models, the propulsion impulse must originate from the base."

So they descended the stairs, entered another dark corridor, found another switch and pressed it, and thus they proceeded, lighting the interior of the

rocket as they went. And as they descended, the roar of the exhaust increased in volume, indicating that they were nearing its source.

Presently they entered a large, circular room with an illuminated dial at the far end. Drawing near, they saw a confusion of instruments that for a moment left them dazed.

While Stoddard studied them in bewilderment, Prescott circled the room till he found a switch. Pressing it, he produced a brilliant flood of illumination.

"Now then, let me have a look at this," he said, returning to the dial. "Professor Goddard once explained to me the workings of one of his experimental models. The motive force must be some liquefied mixture, possibly oxygen and hydrogen. Some of these instruments—most of them, in fact—must be valves."

He touched one, turned it, and the rocket responded with a sickening burst of speed.

"No, that won't do! We're going plenty fast enough now!"

He touched another, and they slacked off dizzyingly.

"Well, there are two controls, anyway. Now then, how do they steer this thing? That is the next problem we must solve."

But though he touched this instrument and that, producing weird effects, their course continued in the direction set. And meanwhile, they were hurtling outward through space at a rate of speed he knew would presently carry them beyond the gravitational pull of the earth.

Then, as he grasped and swung down a curious lever that worked in a quadrant, they felt a violent lunge to the left, and for a moment it seemed they would shoot to the ceiling.

"Good God!" gasped Stoddard. "What's happened?"

"Nothing—only that I've found how to steer this wild

steed!" cried the professor, exultantly.

It was really quite simple, he explained, as he eased up on the lever. In application, it was a development of the gyroscope principle, that a wheel revolving freely within a freely suspended frame tends to make the frame revolve in the other direction.

"You see, the rocket is the freely suspended frame," he went on, "while this lever controls a gyroscopic wheel somewhere. To set it spinning to the right causes us to turn to the left, and vice versa."

"But you almost stood us on our heads, a moment ago! How did that happen?"

"Simply because I threw the lever too far to the right. We are in interstellar space, obviously, where every change of direction involves an adjustment of equilibrium."

And if Stoddard didn't exactly understand, being first a secret service man and only secondarily a scientist, at least he showed his ignorance no further. If the

professor could bring this astounding machine back to Earth, that was all he wanted.

Prescott said he could, he thought, providing they had fuel enough left. So for the next few minutes, while the younger man held his breath, the professor labored with the various instruments on that complicated dial.

"Now then, I think we're headed back," he said at length, relaxing. "But we've got to have visibility, otherwise we will land with a velocity of about twenty thousand miles an hour, which is what I figure we're making at the present time."

"Good Lord!" gasped Stoddard. "I'll say we've got to have visibility! Wait a minute! Let me look around!"

He searched the room for further instruments—to find nothing that in any way met the purpose.

But even as he returned dejected, the professor cried out:

"Here—I've got it! Take a look at this!"

Bending over a small table beside the dial, Stoddard saw mirrored, in its ground-glass surface a hazy circular panorama that at first had no significance. But as he continued to peer down upon the scene, certain familiar aspects loomed out. It was the Earth—and what he was looking at was a view of the North and South American continents!

For some moments Stoddard stared at this amazing panorama in silence; saw it grow rapidly clearer, as the careening rocket plunged like a giant shell toward the earth.

"My God!" he whispered at length in awe. "Do you think you can ever check our speed?"

"I think so," the professor replied, busy over his instruments. "But where do we want to land? How do we know what state we were in?"

Whereupon Stoddard told him of that Texas license plate.

"But we don't want to land anywhere near that fiend Krassnov," he added, with a shudder. "I suggest, if it's possible, that you pick out some aerodrome, preferably in the western part of the state—for if I remember my geography, Texas isn't mountainous in the east."

"I will do the best I can," said Prescott, grimly.

There followed tense minutes as the panorama in that ground-glass narrowed and grew more intense. Now they could see only North America, now only the United States and a portion of Mexico, and now only Texas.

"Back—back!" cried Stoddard, as the rugged land loomed up, spread into a panorama of towns and ranches. "We're descending too fast! We're bound to crash, unless—"

But already the professor had touched the ascending valve and swung the steering lever.

Up they zoomed again. Once more a portion of

Mexico was visible on the glass, and along the international border now they could see a winding thread of silver.

"The Rio Grande!" exclaimed the young geologist. "Just follow it up toward its source till we come to El Paso. There'll be a landing-field there."

"Yes, undoubtedly." The professor was working in abstraction over the unfamiliar controls. "Now if I can just hold us on our course...."

We succeeded, and presently a white city gleamed over the curving rim of the horizon to the northwest, the tall chimneys of its smelters throwing long shadows from the lowering sun beyond.

In a minute or two they were over it, at a height of perhaps twelve miles—and now, as they began descending, its patchwork of buildings and plazas unfolded like some great quilt below.

"There's the field!" cried Stoddard, pointing in the glass to a wide clear space on the outskirts. "Can you

make it, do you think?"

"We'll know soon!" was the grim answer, as Prescott worked frantically now with his valves and levers.

"It's a matter of balancing off our flow of gases, of holding up buoyancy to the very last. A little too much, or not enough, and—"

Breathlessly, as they descended, Stoddard peered into the glass. Now a scene of excitement was visible below. Figures could be seen gazing up, waving their arms, running about this way and that.

"They must think they're getting a visit from another planet," said Stoddard. "Or that the end of the world has come!"

"Maybe it has, for us!" agreed the professor, gravely. "I'm afraid we're going to crash. I can't seem to—"

Whatever he was going to add was lost in a sudden, rending concussion that flung them violently down, and plunged the room into darkness.

Staggering to his feet a moment later, bruised and shaken, Stoddard gasped out:

"Professor are you there? Are you all right?"

A groan answered him, and for a moment his heart sank, but then came the reassuring call:

"Yes—all right, I guess. And you?"

"O.K. Let's get out of here, quick!"

An ominous hissing sound beat on their ears, as they groped their way toward the door. Evidently escaping gases from the deranged mechanism, thought Stoddard. The floor rose at an angle, indicating that the rocket was half over on its side.

They found the door, and struggled along the twisted corridor toward a flight of stairs that would lead below; found it, descended, and groped along another dark corridor, seeking an exit; when suddenly, around a bend, daylight confronted them, and to their joy they saw that one of the main doors had been burst

open by the impact.

Approaching it, they peered out—to be greeted by an awed group of officials and mechanics from the field.

As they climbed through, dropped to the ground, the group retreated, taking no chances.

"Back!" called Professor Prescott, warning and reassuring them with a word. Then, turning to his companion: "Come on, Jack—run! This thing is likely to explode at any moment."

Following this advice, Stoddard raced from the rocket with the rest.

At a safe distance, he turned and peered back—to see it standing there at a crazy angle, dust and fumes issuing from under it in a blast that was hollowing a deep crater to the far side.

Even as they looked, the strange craft quivered, tottered, and fell over on its side, and the next instant was enveloped in a blinding sheet of flame that

brought with it a dull detonation and a blast of dazing heat.

The party backed still farther away.

"A nasty mixture, oxygen and hydrogen," muttered the professor, feeling of his singed eyebrows. "We got out of there just in time, Jack."

"I'll say we did!" Stoddard agreed, with a shudder.

By now the higher officials of the field were on the scene, among them a number of Army men.

Curiosity ran high, not unmingled with indignation. Who were these strange visitors? Where had they come from? What did they mean by endangering the lives of everyone, with their damned contraption?

Inquiring for the commandant, they were taken to him—Major Clark Hendricks, U.S.A.—and Stoddard briefly outlined their astounding story, producing credentials, whereupon a squadron of fast military planes was assembled.

From the way they described the mountainous region where the rocket had first landed, mentioning the town Martin's Bluff, that Henry of the ancient Ford had named, the major declared that it must have been the Guadalupe Mountains a hundred miles to the east—and sure enough, a government map showed such a town there.

So it was that presently the squadron lifted into the late afternoon skies, with Major Hendricks in the leading plane, accompanied by the two weary adventurers.

Swiftly the squadron winged eastward. They reached the mountains in less than an hour, and circled them in search of that little wooden shack which Prince Krassnov and his Cossacks had made their rendezvous....

It was like finding a needle in a haystack, and for a time Stoddard despaired of success. But those rugged mountains were an open book to the planes circling high overhead, and with Martin's Bluff once located, the rest was not so hard.

At last, as twilight was falling, they found the shack and brought their planes to rest near it.

But as the party approached the shack, after posting a heavy guard over their planes, they saw that it was deserted.

This, after all, was only what Stoddard had feared, but nevertheless they forced their way inside—and there, had Major Hendricks had any doubt of their story, it was dispelled.

As Stoddard had told them, it was furnished like an Oriental hunting-lodge, with evidences of the recent occupation of the Russians on all sides.

But where were they? Had they got away or were they hiding somewhere?

Proceeding from room to room until they had searched it thoroughly, the party paused baffled.

But not for long, for suddenly Stoddard discovered something that gave him a clue. It was a barred door,

within a closet, covered over with clothes and uniforms so as to be fairly well concealed. On battering it in, they found that it led into a passage below.

As the party entered the passage, leaving further guards above, it became obvious that what they had found was the shaft of an old mine.

It led down abruptly, for a while, then more gradually, with many windings and twistings, and ending presently in another barred door.

This they in turn battered in—to be greeted suddenly by a volley of rifle-fire that dropped three of them in their tracks.

Stoddard was one of those who fell.

Bending over him, Professor Prescott lifted up his head.

"Jack!" he called. "Where are you hit? Answer me!"

"I—it seems to be in the shoulder," came the weak reply. "If you've got a handkerchief—"

The professor produced one and staunched the flow of blood as best he could, working with the aid of his flashlight.

Meanwhile, ahead, the crash of pistols and rifles continued to split the stillness of the passage, as the attacking party pressed forward.

"There—that does it!" gasped Stoddard, at length. "Help me up. I'll be all right."

Prescott steadied him to his feet. They continued on.

Now the firing ceased, and in a moment Major Hendricks appeared, at the head of his party.

"Well, we've got them," he said, saluting Stoddard. "How are you, old man?"

"All right," was the gritted reply. "Let's have a look at them."

A flashlight was swept across the stolid group of Cossack prisoners, but as Stoddard peered into one face after another, he realized that Krassnov was not among them.

"You haven't got the leader," he said. "See here, you birds," he addressed the Cossacks, "where is he, eh?"

If they understood, they gave no indication of it, but shook their heads sullenly.

"Well, damn it, we'll find him!" Stoddard wheeled and strode past them. "Give me three or four men, Major. I'll smoke out that Russian bear. He must be here somewhere."

Hendricks sent the main body above, with their prisoners, and gave him the men he wanted, putting himself at their head.

"You'd better go on up, too, Professor," said Stoddard, addressing Prescott. "You've risked enough, in my behalf."

But the older man shook his head.

"No, I'll come along, if you don't mind," he insisted. "I want to see the end of this thing."

It was an end that came with dramatic suddenness.

Pausing before a barred door some fifty paces down the passage, they were debating what their next move would be—when suddenly it was flung open.

"Come in, gentlemen," came a suave, ironical voice. "Sorry my servants were so uncivil."

In the glare of light from beyond, Stoddard and the professor saw that it was Prince Krassnov.

He stood there unarmed, smiling.

"Is this the fellow?" rasped Major Hendricks, his automatic levelled.

"It is," said Stoddard.

Slowly, cautiously, they followed the man into the

room, which in reality was merely the end of the passage sealed off, though its walls were richly panelled and it was luxuriously furnished.

Pausing beside a small, heavy table, he swept his hand over it, indicating a heap of rough diamonds that must have represented millions.

"Merely a fraction of my treasure, gentlemen," he told them, with a deprecating shrug. "I hadn't quite finished storing away the last shipment, when you interrupted me."

He strode to one of the walls, drew out a small drawer from a built-in cabinet and dumped its glittering contents on the table with the rest.

All around the room, Stoddard noted as he stood there swaying, were other cabinets dotted with the knobs of similar drawers.

"And this, gentlemen, is but my American sub-headquarters," the Prince went on. "In Siberia, in Brazil—but why bore you with the multiplication of

my now useless wealth? Tell me, instead, my good friends—Professor Prescott, Doctor Stoddard—how come you back here, after I saw you safely on your way earlier in the afternoon?"

"Because I happen to have a knack with can-openers, and my colleague is rather adept with machinery," Stoddard told him, "while Major Hendricks here is quite a hand with geography, not to mention aviation."

A question or two, which they answered briefly, and Krassnov had the story.

"Ah, my poor rocket!" he sighed. "But it is fate, I suppose; Kismet, as the Turkish say. Still, I deserved a better fate than to be captured by a pair of American professors, when the secret service of the world was on my trail."

"Then cheer up!" said Stoddard, gritting his teeth to keep back the pain of his throbbing shoulder. "For I have the honor to represent Washington in this case."

At that, the prince scowled darkly for a moment. Then

he brightened.

"Kismet again! I might have acted differently, had I known that, but—well, I drink to your success, Doctor Stoddard!"

Whereupon, before they could restrain him, he lifted a vial from a shelf over one of the cabinets and downed its contents.

"A diamond-dust cocktail!" he smiled, replacing the vial. "The most expensive, even in your country of costly drinks—and the most deadly!"

But Stoddard knew, as the doomed nobleman stood there facing them in stoic triumph, that diamond dust in the human system was as slow as it was deadly, and that the desperate gesture had been futile, so far as justice was concerned.

There would be ample time, in the weeks Prince Krassnov of Imperial Russia still lived, to round up his international allies and stamp out the remnants of their amazing ring of diamond smugglers.

While as for Professor Prescott, he was thinking with what amazement the members of his expedition back on Kinchinjunga would receive the cablegram he would dispatch that night, informing them that Stoddard and himself were safe in El Paso, Texas.

95 The Slave Ship from Space by Desmond Winter Hall

Three kidnapped Earthlings show Xantra of the Tillas how "docile" Earth slaves can be.

Aproximate word count: 11,600

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

Twice that night the two young men had seen the thing, and their hour for turning in had long since passed as they lay half reclining on the ground by their campfire waiting, hoping that it would return once more. Their interest in the strange visitant had completely banished all sensations of fatigue from a full day of vacation fishing in the cold Adirondack streams among which they were camping for that month.

They had discussed the appearance until there was nothing more they could say; and now as for the last

hour, they watched in silence, only moving to knock the dottle from their pipes and to get fresh lights off the splinters they stuck into their slumbering fire. The velvet night was now at full reign, and the myriad stars in their familiar patterns leaned close—brilliant jewels for man to share but never pluck.

Jim Wilson had seen the thing first—a pinpoint of cherry red that moved upward in a perfect arc against the brilliant white constellations of the east. As it rose, it grew perceptibly larger, to dwindle again as it arced over the western horizon.

Nearly an hour later it had appeared again; but this time, when halfway up the skies, it had changed its direction until it was heading directly over the spot where the two thrilled campers were watching; and as it approached they saw its color fade slowly until it had disappeared completely from sight among the inky patches between the stars overhead. For minutes the two were not able to locate it—until Jim, once again, had pointed to a faint red spot that grew in color and intensity as it drew away from the zenith. Once again it had disappeared over the rim of the

western world—and from then on there was no thought of sleep in the minds of Jim Wilson and Clee Partridge. They were watching the skies, hoping it would return.

"What was the thing?" Jim Wilson exclaimed suddenly with exasperation. "I've been racking my brain, Clee, but nothing I can think of makes sense. It couldn't have been a plane, and it couldn't have been a meteor. And if it was a fire-fly—well, then I'm one too." He paused, and looked at the other. "Any new suggestions?" he asked.

"Me—I still think it was a space ship from Mars or Venus," Clee Partridge answered drily; "searching for a couple of good Earth-men to help 'em out of some jam. You noticed the way it disappeared for a moment when it was overhead: it was looking us over."

"Then it'll be back," answered Jim, not to be outdone, "for it's not apt to find anyone better qualified. I, myself, would kinda like to take a joy-ride out through the Great Dipper."

Clee smiled and looked down at the luminous dial of his wrist watch. The two resumed their vigil, and there was quietness between them. For some time they lost themselves in the sparkling glory of the firmament, hardly moving, except to pull closer the collars of their flannel shirts against the increasing coldness of the mountain air.

And then for the third time that night the mysterious sky traveler sprang over the trees on the eastern horizon. Suddenly it appeared; both men saw it at once; and this time it made a clear, beautiful arc straight for the zenith. As it raised, it grew in size, a beautiful, delicate cherry star spanning the whole welkin. The two men got to their knees and watched it, breathless with fascination.

"Look!" cried Jim suddenly.

As had happened on its second appearance, the thing began to slow up and its color gradually faded as it drew directly overhead. By the time it should have reached the zenith it could no longer be seen. It had dissolved against the inky spaces above.

"It should come into view again in a moment," Clee said; "a little farther on, like the other time."

They watched, thrilled by the mystery of the midnight phenomenon. Minutes passed, but still it did not appear. Clee grew restive, and as his eyes chanced on his wrist watch he started violently and held out his arm for Jim to see. The radium-painted hands and dial were glowing with unusual brilliance.

Looking quickly into the skies again, Clee sensed something wrong; something different. For a moment he could not figure out what—and then it came to him. One of the great stars, one that he had been watching in its climb up the sky through the night, had disappeared!

He got excitedly to his feet, grabbed his companion's arm and pointed out this strange thing—and as he pointed another star blinked out and did not reappear.

"Something's happening up there," Jim said soberly. "I don't know what; but I, for one, don't feel quite comfortable."

He kept peering at the place pointed out, at a spot of black even darker than the inky sky; or did he only imagine it was darker? he asked himself. Soon the spot enlarged; became a distinct patch; then, growing still, obliterated one star after another around its borders. It made a pure circle; and before long the starlight glinting off its sides showed it to be a great, tinted sphere.

Swiftly it dropped down on the two men, and they watched it hypnotized, incapable of moving. It was only a hundred yards overhead when some presence of mind returned to Clee.

"Run, Jim!" he yelled, moving away. "It's coming straight down!"

Wilson came out of his daze and the two sprinted wildly for the path that led down the spur on which their camp was located. They had not made more than fifty yards when they heard a dull thud, and, turning, saw the great sphere resting on the ground with a slight rocking motion that quickly ceased.

A gully cut into the trail ahead, and when they reached it Clee grabbed his partner's arm and pulled him off to one side, where, panting with their sudden exertion, they wormed up to the brow and peeped over at their strange visitor.

She sphere stood in the starlight on the very spot they had been occupying when they first saw it. Right in their campfire it lay—a great, dark-red crystal shape perhaps fifty feet in diameter, whose surface sparkled with innumerable facets. It rested quietly on the ground, as if oblivious of the two routed men breathlessly watching it from a short distance. No ports or variations of any kind were visible to mar its star-reflecting sides.

"It must be some new kind of dirigible!" murmured Jim; "but why did it go and pick on us for its midnight call!"

"It's a space ship from Mars," answered Clee with a serious face. "They heard you, and're coming to take you for your ride. See?" he added quickly, pointing.

A large door was opening in the side of the sphere, and the illumination within threw a bright beam of amber-colored light in their direction. A metallic ramp slid out and angled down to the ground.

Breathlessly the two men waited to see who would emerge, but a long time went by without their catching the slightest sign of life within. The face of Clee's wrist watch was fluorescing brilliantly now, and moment by moment the weird glow was increasing. Jim stirred nervously.

"I don't mind telling you, I'm scared," he said.

"Aw, they won't make you walk back," consoled Clee; but he was scared himself. Why didn't something happen? Why didn't someone come out of the ship?

Jim thought he heard a noise, and touched Clee on the shoulder, pointing to a place on the trail down which they had come a few minutes before. Clee looked, and as he did so the hair on the back of his neck stood up. For the bushes along the side of the path were moving as if they were being brushed aside

by someone in passing—someone making a straight line to the spot where they lay concealed. And no one was there!

"Can they be invisible?" breathed Jim, every pore in his body prickling.

For a moment the two men could hardly breathe, so great was their unnamed fear. During that time no other movements could be noted. Then Clee suddenly pointed to a bush only five yards away. Half a dozen leaf-tipped branches were bending slowly in their direction—and then a sharp crack, as of a broken twig, came to them from the same spot.

Panic, blind and unreasoning, swept them. "Run!" gasped Jim; and together, instinctively, they turned and scrambled down the side of the ridge to get away, anywhere, far from the approaching menace of they knew not what. Reckless of possible injury, they slid and stumbled down the brush-covered slope—and right behind them came sudden crashing sounds of pursuit.

New fears lent wings to their flight, but the sounds behind continued inexorably at their heels no matter how fast they ran or how lucky they were in making past obstacles. Their pursuer was as fast as they. They had no idea who—or what—it might be, for in the brief glances they snatched over their shoulders they could not see anything at all!

The going was bad, and the two campers had not gone more than a quarter-mile when they were breathing hard, and felt that they could not make one more step without collapsing on the ground to give their laboring lungs a chance to catch up. Panting like dogs they dragged themselves along through pine and birch trees, around large rocks and over briar-covered hills, only a few steps ahead of their pursuer.

Then Partridge, a little in the lead as they made their way up a steep slope, heard Jim suddenly go sprawling; heard him gasp:

"It's got me!"

Turning, he saw his partner rolling and threshing

violently on the ground, and now and then lashing out at the empty air with his fists. Without a moment's hesitation he jumped from his position above—jumped square and hard into the space which Jim's invisible assailant should be occupying. With a great thud he crashed into some unseen body in the air, and went down, the breath knocked out of him. As he got to his knees an odor like that of cloves came to his nostrils, and something caught him around the neck and began constricting. Frantically he tried to tear himself loose, but the harder he struggled the more strangling became the grip on his neck; and at last, faint from the growing odor and the lack of air, his efforts dwindled into a spasmodic tightening and relaxing of the muscles.

Then, for a moment, the hold on his neck must have loosened, for he found himself able to breathe a little. Turning, he saw Jim at his side, apparently similarly held.

"If I could only—see it!" Clee managed to get out. Jim's spasmodic, bitter answer came a moment later.

"Being invisible—tremendous advantage!" he gasped.

In desperation the two men again began to fight against the clutches that were holding them, and this time the grip about their necks unexpectedly loosened—to bring to their noses the odor of cloves overpowering in strength. And that was all they knew before they lapsed into a black and bottomless void....

Through the lifting haze of returning consciousness Clee felt a command to get up. As he automatically complied he saw that Jim was doing likewise. Once on his feet he felt another impulse to go to the cherry-crystal sphere, visible in the distance; but his legs were weak, and neither he nor Jim could walk very well until out of the nothingness around them came something of invisible bulk to lend them support.

Slowly, carefully, straight for the waiting globe the two men were conducted; and in his state of half-consciousness Clee wondered at the impotence of his will to make his body offer resistance. They passed right by their tent and up the ramp to the inside of the strange sphere.

Clee's impressions were blurred and dull, but he noticed that they were in a small room brilliant with amber light, on one wall of which there was a circular area which contained a dozen or more instruments and levers and wheels. As his eyes rested on them, one of the levers moved, seemingly of itself, and the ramp came sliding into the ship and the thick door slowly swung closed. Then they were conducted along a short, narrow passageway into which opened, on the right, a small dim room; and there the grip about their bodies loosened and they slumped to the floor. The door whereby they had entered, closed.

A faint vibration became noticeable; they suddenly felt very heavy; and to the accompaniment of a low but rising hum they saw one wall of their room begin to glow with a beautiful cherry color. Although they had been too stupefied to try to speak, this spurred their tired bodies, and they dragged themselves over to it. They found the wall to be of some kind of hard crystal; it was the outer shell of the sphere; and it now gleamed redly transparent.

Far out and down the men saw a great convex surface

on which lay narrow ribbons of silver, winding veinlike through dark areas that were in some places lit by little clusters of twinkling lights. As they watched, the distances on the surface shrank in on themselves; they could see the outline of a great circle. The sight stimulated the exhausted men. In a hushed and awestruck voice, Jim Wilson broke the silence.

"We've been kidnaped," he said. "Being taken God knows where, out among the stars...."

He was getting the sky-ride he had asked for.

Clee smiled faintly, and was going to remind him of this; but he was too tired to make the effort. He only looked at the tremendous scene below: at the Earth they knew so well, with its familiar streets, comfortable fireplaces, the faces of those they loved and those others who were their friends....

The Earth soon became a ball—a globe such as he had used at school, showing clearly the outline of the continents and oceans. And little by little it dwindled,

until it was only a ghostly shape far out in nothingness....

A little later, had the two Earthlings not been deep in sleep, they might have seen enter a strange-looking man clad in odd garments—a man whose great, bulging head was quite bald, and whose wrinkled, leprous-white face wore an expression of unutterable wisdom and majesty. In his hands he carried a strange piece of apparatus which he held to Jim's wrist while it emitted a coarse vibratory hum that whined slowly up in pitch until it passed the range of hearing. He did the same thing to Clee, and then he quietly left.

But the two Earthlings knew nothing of this. Limp on the floor, oblivious to everything, they slept....

Some hours later found the kidnapped men well recovered and sitting on the floor of their cell talking over their situation. As usual, Wilson was thinking out loud.

"What can they be?—or who?" he asked, frowning with his thought. "They can't be from Earth, for no

one there could invent such a ship as this and keep it a secret; and even if someone had, he could never have done the equally astounding thing of inventing a way to render living bodies invisible. I doubt if the thing that caught us was human, by what I was able to feel in my short struggle with it. There was something that might have been a hand; but the strength and the weight of its body was enormous!"

"Well, we'll probably soon see," commented Clee with philosophic resignation and pulling out of a hip pocket a package of tobacco and his corn-cob pipe.

"Or, rather, we may soon know. Our captors may keep themselves invisible; and of course it's barely possible that it's their natural state to be invisible, so that we may never hope to see them. What I'm chiefly afraid of, is that they are from some other planet, and that that's where we are being taken—though heaven knows what any creatures so infinitely far ahead of us Earthlings scientifically could want with a pair of young Earth lawyers!"

He offered the package to Jim. "Here, have a smoke; you'll feel better," he said. "While there's tobacco

there's hope."

"At least they don't seem disposed to kill us right off," returned Jim, handing back the tobacco after lighting his own pipe. "Later—if there's to be any 'later' for us—we may be able to find a way to get out of this room; though how we'd run the ship, to get back home, is another hard brick wall.... Maybe the controls are invisible, too!" he suggested with a wry grin. "Ever take any pre-law courses on how to work the invisible controls of a space ship?"

Clee's reply was spoken low, and was entirely irrelevant.

"That's funny," he said.

He was looking at the face of the watch on his left wrist. For the first time since they had been abducted, its abnormal brightness had left it.

As Jim watched, inquiringly, Clee moved his right hand a little, and once more the dial leaped out through the dimness with unnatural brilliance. Jim

saw that his friend was holding in this hand the package of tobacco. Clee repeated the demonstration.

"The dial glows with unusual brightness always—except when I hold the package of tobacco in front of it at this spot," he said wonderingly, half to himself. "If I remember my science right, ultra-violet light would make the radium on the dial glow; and the lead in the tin-foil of the tobacco wrapping would screen it off. Let's see—"

He crossed to the other side of the room and held his watch and the package of tobacco in various positions until he again found one line along which the watch-dial gave off only its customary light.

"Yes," he said, "—exactly in the extended line made by my watch and this package of tobacco is the source of the ray which makes the watch-dial glow. It's probably the control room of this ship."

"An extraordinary deduction, my dear Sherlock," commented Wilson drily; "and valuable. I wish you'd now take a moment and deduce the reason for the

mysterious appearance of the lumps on the back of our necks. I know I didn't have mine before I was taken for this sky-ride."

As he spoke, his hand sought the back of his neck where there was a fat lump about the size of a quarter—a lump not painful, for all its newness and size. Hard pushing with probing fingers had revealed something that seemed to be hard and flat, buried within; but close examinations failed to show any wound or scar, and the men had no notion what the lumps might be. Clee's was just like Jim's.

But Clee did not respond to his friend's invitation. A heavy mood had come over him; he was standing by the outer wall, looking out. Jim went and stood beside him, his hand on his shoulder, and together they gazed through the cherry-crystal wall of their prison ship out on the loneliness of the immeasurable miles outside. For them, space was red, instead of the deep black they knew they would see through colorless glass. Brilliant pinpoints of light, millions of them, in all sizes, made up the infinite space that was the background of their adventure.

To which one—near which one were they going? Would they ever return to their Earth again? Would their friends ever know of the incredible adventure that had overtaken them?—or would they, after the few weeks of searching and inquiry that must follow their disappearance, at last conclude that some nameless mountain disaster had made them victims, and give them up for dead? No doubt. And month after succeeding month their memory would fade from the minds of those who had loved them, while they would be—where?...

A peculiar, dynamic thought came simultaneously into the minds of the two men. It was not a word: it seemed more like a feeling; but its unquestionable import was "Come." Together they rose, and looked at each other wonderingly. Again came the feeling. They started for the door.

"But that's foolish!" Jim said aloud, as if objecting to his own thought. "The door's locked! We tried it!" He looked at Partridge, who returned his gaze blankly—and then, in spite of what he had said, he reached out and turned the latch.

The door swung open!

Expressions of surprise died on the men's lips as again came the compelling urge to go to some unknown destination.

"Suggestion!" said Clee, as he passed through the doorway. "Someone's suggesting—telepathically willing—that we come to him! And I—God help me—I can't resist!"

His neck corded with veins and muscles with his effort to restrain his body from obeying the mysterious command that was drawing it onward. Wilson, one arm outstretched in a repelling gesture, his legs stiff and tight, was also trying to resist. But the will that had sounded within them was stronger than theirs, and slowly, inevitably, they were drawn down the passage.

Their carpeted way took them back to the entrance chamber and then up a steeply sloping corridor that led upward to the left. As they passed along they saw that the hand of a master had made on the walls, in

panel effect, marvelously complicated decorations in many-colored mosaic. No man of Earth could ever have done such work, the two men realized—and this thought did not cheer them any.

At the top of their curving passage a doorway led them into a spacious room hung with soft, finely woven tapestries with a metallic lustre and furnished with deep-napped rugs and luxurious chairs and divans. Through this room the intangible threads of the alien will directed them—on into a wide-vaulted alcove about one-third its size. There, the strange clutch on them relaxed, and they looked about, at first apprehensively, then with growing boldness and curiosity.

"This is the control room!" exclaimed Clee suddenly; and after a moment Jim agreed with him. It was the simplicity of the controls which had prevented them from recognizing it at first. Against the left wall was a great table with a tilted top, bearing, in its center, a raised and hooded eyepiece giving a view into a large, enclosed black box. On each side were several rows of small, shiny, metallic levers and what they took to be

instrument dials—round, cup-shaped depressions with pointers free to move across dials lined with disorderly and meaningless convolutions. For the full length of the middle wall, straight ahead, was a broad table of some jet-black polished material, and on it was a large array of instruments and apparatus, all unfamiliar to them. Against the draperies of the wall to their right was one large cushioned chair, simple and beautiful in its lines.

No living person or thing could be discerned in either the main room or the alcove.

For several minutes the two men walked all about, examining everything they saw with curiosity and interest; and then Clee discovered a peculiar thing. His watch-dial, glowing very brightly now, would perceptibly increase in brilliance every time he neared the great chair. With sudden inspiration he took out his package of tobacco and held it in the line his watch made with the chair—and he found that his watch stopped glowing. He tried it again from another angle, and the result was the same. From that chair came the electrical disturbance that was

making his watch-dial glow—yet nowhere near the chair was any bit of electrical apparatus to be seen.

What he did see in the chair, though, almost caused his heart to stop beating. The cushions of the seat, compressed before, began to puff out to full volume, as if someone had just risen from them. And then, faintly but sharply outlined in the long-napped rug in front, appeared the print of a human shoe!

"A man!" breathed Clee. "A human being!"

The two men stood frozen in their tracks. Clee's arm, with the package of tobacco in his hand, was still outstretched toward the great chair, but now the dial of his watch was glowing brightly again. Something within caused him in spite of his terror to move the package between the watch and the space above the footprint on the rug. The glowing stopped. The man—devil—whatever it was that made the print—was the source of the strange excitation!

This took but a second—the interval before another shoe-print formed in the rug in their direction. Jim

gasped something unintelligible and started to back away; but no sooner did Partridge start to follow suit, than a compulsion to stand still came over them. Caught where they were, unable to move, they saw the shoe-prints come towards them. Slowly, step by step, twelve inches apart, they came, and did not stop until they were only four or five feet away.

"We'll jump him, if we get the chance!" hissed Jim, never taking his eyes off the prints.

"Yes," came the answer; but Clee's further words were cut off in the making by an added compulsion to keep quiet. Were their words understood? The two men were locked, speechless, where they stood. And by some creature with a human footprint whom they could not see!

The touch of firm flesh came out of the nothingness of space about them, to poke and pry all over their bodies. Anger began to take the place of their fear, as, for some time, impotent of resistance, they had to submit to the examination given them. They were prodded and felt like dogs at a show; their breathing

and heart action were carefully listened to; their mouths were opened and their teeth inspected as if they were horses offered for sale. Both men were inwardly fuming.

"Dogs!" shouted Clee in his thoughts. "Treating us like dogs, to see how healthy we are! Does he want us for slaves?"

At last the examination came to a stop, and they saw the shoe-prints in the rug go over to the black table and remain there, heels toward them, while various pieces of apparatus were invisibly moved across the table top. For a moment the compelling will did not seem, to Clee, to be constraining him as much as it had, and he began to wonder if he might not have a little control over his body again. Tentatively he tried to break through the oppressing blanket of foreign will; his arms and legs moved a little; he succeeded! He caught Jim's eye and showed him. He thrilled all over at his discovery, and his will to move measurably increased with his growing confidence that he could.

The toes of the prints were still turned away. He was

going to try and get the man or monster who was making them.

He gestured to Jim, and with a great effort took a step in the invisible man's direction. A thrill of gladness helped him on—for Jim was following suit!

Again and again, with greatest mental effort, they made steps toward the footprints, which, remaining side by side and motionless, gave them increasing hope of stealing up unobserved. When they were only three feet away Clee motioned to Jim, and with a tremendous effort of will they jumped at the space where their enemy should be.

They hit him hard, and bore him heavily to the floor. By the feel, he was a man such as they! Clee's blood leaped with the lust for revenge, and blanking his mind against strong urges to cease his attack he rained savage blows at the place he was holding.

But almost at once they had evidence that their opponent was not such a man as they. A terrific pain stabbed suddenly through them, and they doubled up

on the floor, writhing in agony. It was as if every nerve in their bodies had turned into white-hot wire, and was searing through their flesh. Again and again came the terrible stabs of pain—and their source seemed to be the mysterious lumps at the back of their necks!

At last they ceased coming, and Jim and Clee stretched out on the floor all but unconscious from the terrific shocks of fiery agony. They were completely helpless; further thoughts of resistance were unthinkable. But they were not left lying long. There came a telepathic compulsion to stand up; and they found themselves obeying, in spite of the shrieking protest of their every nerve.

Twitching, stumbling, they were made to do servile things—to kneel on the floor; get up again; turn round and round; bow low, then stretch backwards. And out of the air around them came shocking blows which landed on their faces, necks and chests; feet which kicked out at their shins; and they had to stand there and take it, helpless to resist.

Then Clee, as the nearer of the two men, was pushed over to the work-table, where an oval head-piece of finely-woven wire was fitted over his head. Another very large one, standing next to it, and connected to it by wires which led to a small instrument panel nearby, lifted into the air until it must have settled about the head of their persecutor. A dial on the panel turned slowly. And gradually the helmet resting in the air dissolved into nothingness before their eyes.

A slight nausea swept over Clee as it did so, and in the midst of it he felt a series of sharp, staccato thoughts—thoughts which did not seem to be composed of words, and yet were clear and intelligible.

"Fool of a fool!" crackled in his brain with almost a physical effort, "do you think to resist Xantra? Do you think with your sub-human minds to overcome one of the Tillas, Masters of the Universe? Close you were to death—and death indeed would have come had I not other plans for you.

"Know that henceforth you and your companion are

my slaves. You will jump at my slightest will; serve me as best you can with such intelligence as you may possess. For faithful, willing service you shall have food and clothing and a portion of leisure.

Disobedience and tardiness will bring you the pain you have already tasted; revolt, or the attempt to escape—death; but only after torture such as you have never known.

"I shall never repeat this mode of communication: it is as physically nauseating to me as to you. And you may never expect to see me, though I can always see you. By vibrational means I have given you the universal atomic rhythm of all Tillian slaves; and, although in that state your fellow-slaves will be visible to you, I, your master, will not!

"You will now return to your place of confinement. After you have recovered you will be taken in hand by your fellow-slaves and shown your duties. And if your instinct for self-preservation is only one-tenth normal, you will never again be such a stupid sub-animal fool as to attempt to resist Xantra—to fly in the face of the inevitable!"

The sharp, staccato voice in Clee's brain stopped; his nausea began to leave him; his helmet was removed; and had he been looking he might have seen the other one slowly materialize on the table. The ordeal was over just in time, for the last remnants of his strength was giving out—as was Jim's. The two Earth-men slumped down, and would have fallen but for the telepathic will, stronger than theirs, that forced them erect again. There came a very strong compulsion to return to their cell, and bruised, stumbling, their nerves still afire from their strange stabbing pains, they made their way back.

They fell to the floor and passed into unconsciousness—beaten, subdued. Slaves....

After a long blank interval a distinct thought crossed Clee's mind. He was in heaven, and an angel voice had spoken. There it was again! Cool hands were stroking his wrists and forehead. He opened his eyes and looked, but seeing no one closed them again.

The Voice returned, and two of the words which kept repeating were somehow familiar. "So sorry ... so

sorry...." The Voice was low and cool and feminine. And someone was bathing his battered head.... He rolled over and got up on one elbow. He still could see no one.

The Voice said: "Oh, I'm so glad you're better! I thought you'd never come to!"

Mechanically Clee asked: "Who are you?"

"Vivian Gray," came the quick answer; "from Boston. And you?"

Clee did not answer, but started to lie back again. Things were all wrong: he couldn't even see anyone. He'd go back to sleep, and wake up some other time. But the Voice wouldn't let him.

"Oh, you must listen!" it said. "I haven't much time!"

"Where are you?" he asked.

"Why—right here!" came the surprised answer. "Can't you see me?"

"No," answered Clee, still not himself. He added categorically: "I can see Jim. I can see the door. I can see my hands, but I can't see you."

"Oh, then it must be true! Xantra told me he was going to make you one of his common slaves; but I hoped—I hoped—"

This didn't mean much to Clee; but with the words came memory of all that had happened, and with sudden concern he crept over to where Jim was lying, to see how he was. He found him blinking and stirring, aroused by the voices. Quickly he explained the invisible presence to him, warning him to be on guard.

"Oh, but I'm a friend—Vivian Gray—kidnapped from Earth just like you!" came quick explanation out of the air. "Xantra stole me from Cape Cod, where I was vacationing, about the time he took you. Xantra is the one whose space ship we are on. He looks much like a man; he is some kind of a man; but he's not from Earth—"

"You've seen him?" interrupted Clee, beginning to believe the Voice a little.

"Yes," came the instant response; "not when he abducted me—he had made himself invisible for that—but always after. Haven't you yet?" And then, without waiting for his answer, she gave it herself. "But of course you couldn't see him if he's already given you the universal atomic rhythm the slaves have. You'd then be able to see only each other, and the other slaves; not Xantra and not me.

"I think he makes his slaves that way for protection," she explained. "They can't very well plot or rebel against him when they can't even see him, and never know but what he's around."

"Who are these slaves you keep mentioning?" Jim broke in. "How many of them are there on this ship: and how many like Xantra?"

"Xantra is the only one of his kind," came the answer. "The slaves are a race of inferior people found on his planet—wherever that is: I couldn't understand, from

his explanation, just where. They are creatures much like ugly human beings with a touch of the ape, and are entirely bald, very strong and not very intelligent. There're seven or eight on board. Normally they are good-natured: but sometimes when they have a hard master, like Xantra, they take to hating him; and when they do that they can be very fierce and treacherous. That's the main reason for Xantra's stopping at Earth: to see what kind of slaves we humans will make. He is hoping that we will be more intelligent than those he has—and more docile, and safer to have around."

"Well," snorted Jim belligerently, "if Mr. Xantra thinks that I'm going to be safe to have around, he's a lot dumber than I am!"

"Oh, it's good to hear you talk that way," the girl's voice went on. "We three have got to stick together, and find some way to escape!"

"I've so much to say!" she went on; "but I daren't stay long, for fear of getting caught. What you said is where my chief hope lies: Xantra doesn't realize how intelligent we are, and how dangerous; and we

mustn't let him know! I think he believes we are much like his present slaves: he gets away with murder with them. You've noticed the lumps on the back of your necks? Well, they have them, too; it's something that's attached to the spinal cord and gives him telepathic control over them; also the power to hurt them dreadfully—as you've unfortunately found out. His slaves don't understand these lumps; they don't seem to know that he would lose control if they could only in some way get rid of the things in their necks!"

For the first time since the girl started talking, Clee spoke. His voice was low and grave, and there was a tinge of suspicion in it.

"Just how does it happen," he asked, "that you know so much about things here?"

The girl's voice broke as she gave her answer.

"I'm ashamed to tell you," she said. "Xantra—he—he admires me as a healthy animal; one close, in species, to himself. He thinks by being nice to me that he might be able to make me a willing companion to

share his trip!" For a moment the girl was silent; and when she spoke again there was a hard note in her voice.

"I let him have hopes," she said, "—deliberately. I planned to make him trust me, and give me the run of the ship, so I could find out all I could. So far—before you came—I saw no slightest hope of ever escaping back to Earth; but I had at least to look for a quick, sure way to death, in case—in case—"

"You—and us too!" exclaimed Clee impulsively. "No Earth-man—no American, at least—is ever going to submit to slavery. If the worst comes to the worst, we'll at least die together, Vivian!"

Jim added soberly: "And perhaps, if we do, no one from Xantra's planet will ever again come to Earth looking for 'docile' slaves...."

For a moment everyone was silent, affected by the thought behind what they had said. Then the girl's voice suggested, with a touch of Earth formality that was almost ludicrous under the circumstances: "But

you two men have not yet introduced yourselves!"

Both Clee and Jim smiled, and told her their names, and in the slight pause that followed Clee said awkwardly, almost shyly: "Miss Gray, we don't know what's in store for us here, and it—it's possible that we may never know each other any better: so would you—I mean, I wonder would you mind if I reached out and touched you. In spite of all we have said. I—I can hardly realize that you are there, somewhere, before me."

Out of the nothingness came an impulsive soft hand that closed over his. There was both a smile and something deeper in Vivian's voice as she said, "Here," and raised his hand until it touched her brow and the thick smooth hair of her head. Then she placed it a little lower, over her face; and gently Clee's fingers told him what his eyes could not read.

"In case you never see me—why, I—I'd like you to know that I'm really, not bad looking," she said; and Clee knew she was blushing as he smiled at the eternal feminine in her.

But the smile suddenly left his face. His hand had felt her give a distinct start. Then—

"He's calling!" she gasped faintly. "Xantra's calling for me to come to him!" Her voice, as she spoke, moved, and Clee knew she was going towards the door.

"No!" he cried impulsively. "Don't risk it! Stay here, and we'll begin our fight against him right now!"

"I will be safe," came Vivian's reassuring voice from the door. "I can manage him a while yet." Her further words came with a rush. "But I wanted to tell you—I had a faint plan. If I could get hold of the anaesthetic—the vial of stuff that smells like cloves—"

The door was closing now, and the two men knew she was moving down the corridor. They listened in vain for her to complete what she had been saying. Just before the door clicked shut, Jim jammed his foot in it, preventing it from closing.

"Gee, that girl has courage!" Clee murmured.

For a moment the two men looked at each other. Jim was thinking about the opened door, and the chance they had to get out. But Clee's mind was on something else.

"Well, Jim," he said, "you and I have a nasty job ahead."

Jim looked at Clee wonderingly as he took out his pipe and stuck it in the crack of the door, allowing him to remove his foot. Clee explained to him what Xantra had told him with the thought-sending helmets; reminded him of what they had learned from Vivian about the lumps on their necks. After he had finished he said quietly but decisively:

"Now, we're going to try and remove whatever is under these lumps. Have you got anything sharp? Your knife? Something with an edge on it?"

It would mean escape from the domination of Xantra's will!—from his terrible stabbing punishment!—if they could remove them! Jim breathed a little quicker in his excitement.

"But once we do it—if we can do it—it'll mean that we'll have to make our break to escape right away," he reminded Clee. "We'll be caught if Xantra wills us to come to him and we don't appear!"

"You know what will happen to Vivian if we delay the attempt." Clee reminded him levelly: and Jim knew that Clee was right—that their break for freedom must start right then and there....

He looked through his pockets and produced some cigarettes, matches, a pipe, a nailfile and some utterly useless odds and ends. Clee's hands came out of his pockets empty. "I've got nothing at all," he said—and picked up the nailfile and looked at it questioningly. "We'll have to use this, I guess.... Well, I'm first."

He lay face down on the floor and loosened his collar. Quietly, he made several suggestions. "Light a match and heat the tip in the flame," he said. "The point's pretty dull, but cut as deep and quick and clean as you can. If I yell, pay no attention; I'll try to hold still. Unless it bleeds very much, best not make a bandage; we've nothing clean enough."

That was all he said; and Jim, his heart beating like mad, and a lump in his throat, could find no words at all. He sterilized the tip of the file as directed, studied the lump a moment, then, after a rough, affectionate shake of his friend's shoulder, he knelt close to his task. One quick hard cut; a sharp gasp from Clee; a repetition; then two more times crossways—and a firm, spongelike metallic disc lay revealed. Then the worst—raising it a little, and breaking the several fine wires that led from it through the flesh within....

Clee lay panting, the sweat running down the deep wrinkles of pain on his face. Dark blood oozed from the jagged wound. But he smiled a little, and some of the pain-wrinkles in his face smoothed away, when Jim showed him the disk....

For a short time Clee rested, quieting his nerves, while Jim staunched the flow of blood.

And then it was Jim's turn; and he bore the sharp agony as stoically as Clee....

It was perhaps a strange thing; but at this great

moment in the lives of the two men they felt no need to talk. For the few minutes they rested after they had done, no word was spoken; but in that time a bond of friendship was formed that only death could ever break....

They did not rest long. Every moment brought them nearer to the inevitable discovery of what they had done. Their muscles were still quivering, the wounds on their necks still slowly bleeding, when Clee rose and aroused Jim. The most dangerous, desperate part of their wild revolt lay just ahead.

They were able to make but the vaguest of plans, not knowing what to anticipate outside. They only knew that they would first have to strike boldly for possession of the control alcove—which, without doubt meant they would have, somehow, to kill Xantra—to find and kill a man they could not see, yet who could see them. An enormous task. And only the first of several.

For a moment, realizing this, they hesitated at the door. But the die had been cast; there was nothing for

them to do but go forward—and quickly; so, giving Jim a final warning that they must stick together, Clee opened wide the door and stepped out into the corridor.

What he saw there halted, him in his tracks.

"The slaves!" gasped Jim, and involuntarily both Earth-men backed into the room again. The creatures they had seen at once followed them inside.



There were four of them. As tall as men, they were,

and the general cast of their bodies was identical. But they were different in shocking little details. Their heads were much larger, and in the shape of inverted pears, like those of hydrocephalics; their eyes, popped and dull. The thin lips beneath their stubs of noses were ever writhing and twisting in horrible grimaces. And, worst, their skins were sickly-white, and were absolutely bald of hair. The only clothes they wore were loin-cloths and very large sandals, which exposed to full view their chunky, muscular bodies.

All this the two men took in at a glance. They knew they could never hope to cope, unarmed, with four such creatures as these, so they stood with their backs to the wall, alertly awaiting their first move.

"Easy," warned Clee. "They're probably only coming to take us in hand, as Vivian said."

The nearest of the slaves stepped a little closer to the two men, and by the twitching of its eyelids and the increased mouthings of its lips it was apparent that the creature was highly excited. A high, variable

moaning sound came from its throat. Curiously, boldly, it looked Clee all over—and then it did an amazing thing. Seeing the blood on the back of his neck, it swung him around, put its writhing lips to the still-bleeding wound and dog-like licked it clean.

The gesture was altogether a friendly one.

Another of the slaves of Xantra went up and did the same to Jim, and the two men looked at each other with relief. This meant that the removal of the disks had not been understood by the creatures!

It was with growing hope that they allowed themselves to be conducted from their cell, through the sloping corridor into a doorway they had passed coming in, and down a curving flight of steps into a large room below. They were in the space at the very bottom of the ship, for, through the redly-glowing transparent walls that curved on each side and below, they could see the infinite deeps of star-filled space. Three other slaves were there, waiting for them. At the far side of the room their guide pointed to two small stalls, with a partition between, which they

understood were to be their beds. They were across from a long row of similar ones.

"Making us right at home," commented Jim. "I wonder if they'll serve cakes and tea."

"Wish they would," added Clee; "I'm getting damned hungry. But we've got work to do—and we've got to do it quick!"

His eyes swept the room, looking among the sparse furnishings for something they might be able to use as a weapon. He saw nothing, but the sight of the lump on the neck of a nearby slave gave him an idea.

"I wonder if these slaves would fight for us if we removed the lumps from their necks," he said musingly, his eyes narrow. "I wish there were some way to talk to them...."

He looked from one to another of the animal-men making a circle about them, wondering what to do; then quickly he made his decision. "Jim, I'm going to try. It'll have to be done by signs; I've got to make

them understand, and get their permission."

At once he raised his hand to get the slaves' attention; then, raising both fists high in the air, he shook them violently, at the same time gritting his teeth, working his face, and growling in animal anger at something overhead. He was trying to show the slaves his anger at Xantra, above.

The slaves fell away from him in surprise and alarm, not understanding what he was trying to put across. He continued his demonstration, hopping about furiously, but still without result. Then Jim cried out:

"Touch the place on your neck!"

Clee did so, and the result was startling. Quickly there ran around the circle throaty growls of anger, and every slave raised a hand to the lump on its neck. Evidently they had all felt the awful punishment-pain of their master.

Heartened by this, Clee extended his pantomime. Stopping his demonstration of anger, he put one

finger on the wound on his neck and fell to the floor, writhing in simulated pain. As he lay there groaning, the easily aroused animal-men moaned with him in sympathy. Then Jim, inspired, stepped into the act. Taking out his nailfile, he bent over the prostrate Clee and pretended to cut into his neck, making a great show of removing something and throwing it away; and as he did so Clee jumped to his feet and grinned and hopped about the room in a wildly exaggerated affectation of joy and relief. Then he stopped his acting and carefully showed the slaves the wounds in his and Jim's necks, by finger movements doing his best to make it clear that they had removed something from there.

And then, taking no chances, he repeated the whole pantomime, Jim, at the proper place, acting his part as before.

When at last he stopped and looked around, he was over-joyed at his apparent success in putting across the idea. All over the room the animal-men were repeating his show in its various phases.

"Now I've got to take the disk out of one of them," said Clee, "and it's a mighty dangerous thing to attempt! You see how easily their emotions are aroused. If I hurt too much—!"

"I know," responded Jim, "but we've got to risk it, for if we succeed we've got a good bunch of tough fighters at our backs. We need every bit of help we can get!"

Carefully they made their few preparations, and Clee, again by acting, indicated to one of the animal-men what he wanted to do. He seemed to make himself well understood, for without hesitation the creature lay face down on the floor. The others all gathered around as Clee bent over it, and Jim scanned their faces closely for any sign of suspicion or resentment. Seeing none, he told Clee to start; then held his breath in awful suspense.

The disk appeared near the surface, and with a quick slice Clee made his first incision. With the cut, the prone slave bucked and snarled. Clee murmured soothing words to it in English, and, as the creature

quieted down, made another cut. Again came the bucking and throaty protest; and this time, to Jim's dismay, he saw in the bestial faces of the animal-men around them a sympathetic swing of emotional protest. A little more, now; and Clee would be able to take the disk out; but would the slaves restrain themselves until then?

Again Clee allowed the brute body under him to calm down. Then, as he was about to cut once more, from somewhere above in the space ship came the piercing scream of a woman. Something was happening to Vivian.

Clee half started to rise, to run to her aid, but he forced himself to be reasonable. Weaponless, visible, he could never hope to rescue an invisible girl from someone he couldn't even see. He was on the point of making valuable allies; in just a few moments more—! He decided to hurry through with the job he had undertaken.

All below had heard the scream. The circle around him was shifting uncertainly, and peculiar sounds

were coming out of the brutes' twisting mouths as he bent again over their fellow on the floor.

Clee's hand was trembling like an aspen leaf as he prepared to make the next incision. He was completely unnerved, and with the utmost efforts of his will he was unable to control the nailfile. And he had to hurry!

He sliced as straight as he could at the bleeding lump; the slave moved; and the point of the file slipped deep into the creature's flesh!

At that, with a snarling growl the brute below arched from the floor and flung Clee sprawling. From all around the circle came menacing growls as the bleeding animal-man lumbered to its feet and came after him in a definite attack. Jim, not at that moment the center of their attention, pushed one of the slaves in the way of the charging brute and the two of them half fell; and before they could recover their balance Clee was on his feet making after Jim to the steps that led up out of the room.

"Up!" came Jim's shout. "Fast! We've made them enemies!"

Above them on the stairs was descending another slave, innocent of what had transpired below, and the two men bowled it over in their haste to get past. All the way to the bottom of the stairs it tumbled; and that delayed pursuit for the moment needed by the Earth-men to gain the upper corridor. Quickly they darted through the door; there was no way they could lock or block it, so they had to run on. Taking to the left, they found themselves in the little entrance room, and from there their only course led up the corridor leading to Xantra's quarters and the control alcove.

Arrived there, the two men found the door ajar, but they paused irresolute before it, hardly daring to go in. They had no choice, however, for behind, only fifteen feet away, came the van of the animal-men. They pushed through the door, closed and bolted it, then, wheeling tigerishly, surveyed the room.

They saw no one.

They were not relieved at this. Xantra might well be there; he, as well as Vivian, would be invisible to them. And he had every opportunity of striking first; even then he might be preparing to deal with them, if he was in the room. The slaves were not attempting to break in the door to get them—and this was ominous: it argued that the master was there.

The two men stood motionless at the door, peering intently at the rug in search of telltale footprints. Then Clee touched Jim's shoulder and whispered faintly in his ear:

"Cloves! Smell it?"

Jim nodded. Slowly, on guard every second, they advanced to the alcove. They saw no sign of anyone there, though the odor of cloves was stronger. Jim grabbed a chair and held it ready, and Clee followed suit with a small, heavy tabouret. Cautiously, methodically, the two men began to reconnoitre the large room, examining foot by foot the rug in search of the faint clear prints that would reveal the presence of their enemy. The smell of cloves was

beginning to dull their brains a little. Clee saw the danger in this, and whispered to Jim:

"Faster! Xantra may be insidiously anaesthetizing us! We've got to find where he is—quick!"

They hastened their search, feeling more and more sure that Xantra was close by. And not till then did Clee remember that he had a way to discover Xantra's location. Jim heard him curse under his breath; saw him put down the tabouret and take out his tobacco; and knew at once what he was about to do. He went close to Clee, to guard him with his chair against possible attack.

The face of Clee's wrist watch was glowing brightly; it took only a second to find with the package of tobacco a spot which cut the dial's unnatural glow. As they found it the skin on the two men's bodies prickled all over. The line from the dial to the package of tobacco, if continued, would reach a spot on the floor not six feet away. And looking carefully there they could barely make out, in the bent hairs of the rug, a broken outline that might have been made by a prone figure.

As they prepared to jump they heard from that place a low sigh—and just before them appeared the distinct print of a human hand. Xantra was rising! And coincident with this a sudden banging at the door told them that the slaves at last had started to break in!

As one man the two Earthlings leaped on Xantra; he would have to be taken care of first. When they had fastened on his rising body they punched and pounded it furiously. Though their enemy was undoubtedly only half conscious, the sudden attack aroused him and he resisted vigorously. But then Clee made a lucky connection on what he felt to be his jaw, and the invisible form in their arms went limp.

"Get a rope—wire—anything to bind him with—quick!" yelled Clee. "I'll hold him!"

The pounding at the door was increasing ominously is Jim dashed over to the work-table. Rapidly he looked for something suitable, and in a few seconds was back with a length of stout wire which they quickly wrapped around the ankles and wrists of the limp

form Clee was holding. As the wire touched Xantra it gradually disappeared from their sight, but their fingers reassured them that he was tightly bound.

Then they were at the door, which, shivering and bending from the battering without, showed signs of giving in. With herculean efforts they dragged a heavy divan over and wedged it tightly against it; then added other furniture in a tight supporting pile. But the door, of some light metal, was not built to stand such a siege, and was buckling further inward with each blow being dealt it. More and more plainly the two men could hear the triumphant snarls and howls of the animal-men.

Frantically they ransacked the rooms looking for what they thought might be weapons, but found none. They looked at each other with dismay. It was only a question of time—minutes—before the slaves would break in. What could they do?

In that tense moment of indecision a low, weak voice reached their ears—a woman's voice, and one they remembered well.

"Vivian!" cried Clee, and ran to the alcove, from whence it had seemed to come. The girl's next words brought them understanding.

"Clee—Jim—it's Xantra! He's willing the slaves to break in! He's lying bound on the floor, but he's conscious!"

Clee ran to where he had left the invisible man, cursing himself under his breath for being an utter ass for not having guessed this. His groping fingers quickly found the squirming Xantra's neck; and he had begun to throttle him into unconsciousness when Vivian called out:

"No! Don't! That won't stop the slaves: they've already been given the order! We've got to make Xantra stop them! Here—drag him to the work-table! I've got something—"

Wondering what the girl was about, Clee relaxed his grip on the invisible man's neck and complied. But he suddenly understood—and Jim, too—when he saw coming through the air the pair of thought-sending

helmets. He had a way of communicating with Xantra, of course! He saw the larger helmet lower to rest over the head he was still holding; then soft hands placed the other over his own.

As it settled down a great crash sounded in the other room: the door had given in. It was still held almost in place by the tightly-wedged furniture, but that would not hold the animal-men long.

"Hurry!" cried Jim. "I'll stand by the door!" And he was already on his way to it.

Clee saw the small panel on the table above; saw the knob on it turn. He caught Vivian's excited voice. "Tell him to order them to stop," she said; "or else—or else —"

"He dies!" finished Clee, viciously thumbing into the air where the invisible Xantra's neck was.

With all the intensity he could muster, Clee concentrated on one simple, strong thought. He hardly heard the triumphant cries of the slaves as

they felt the blocking furniture give before their efforts; all his energy was being expended in the will to get his thought across.

"Tell those slaves to stop breaking in or you die!" he commanded.

The noises at the door continued. Either Xantra had not understood, or else he was stubborn. He repeated his command and threat, and still the crashing sounds came to his ears.

Desperate, he played his last card; and unconsciously his lips formed the words of his next mental command, so that it was understood by the breathlessly watching Vivian.

"Tell them to stop!" he willed. "No more air till you do!" And with the words his fingers closed tightly over the other's throat.

The sounds at the door continued; for a moment the invisible form between Clee's knees writhed violently—and then suddenly, almost magically, a silence fell

over the whole room. Clee had forced his will on Xantra! He had made him stop the slaves!

And just in time.

Clee's fingers relaxed a little on the throat of the man beneath him. He turned and said: "Quick, Vivian—find that anaesthetic!" A moment later it was pressed in his hands. "Say when," he told the girl, and held it beneath the nose of the helpless man. Xantra's head at once fell back, and he heard Vivian telling him to stop. He pulled away the bottle, corked it and stood up.

"Well, that's that," he said.

For a moment he was silent. Only the noises made by Jim in strengthening the barricade at the door could be heard in the room. Then he said, earnestly:

"I wish I could see you, Vivian—right now; but that'll have to wait. I guess...."

A low laugh came from the place where the girl was

standing. A hand touched his arm, and he found himself being conducted into the alcove. Vivian laughed again; said, teasingly, "What a stupid expression on your face!" then commanded him to shut his eyes, and keep them shut. He felt something being attached to his wrists; heard a coarse hum that quickly rose in pitch until it passed the range of hearing. He was caught up in a surprising exhilaration; he heard the hum again, sliding down and down in pitch, while every atom in his body felt a sickening vibration that grew ever coarser. Then suddenly he felt normal; the things on his wrists were removed and Vivian told him he could open his eyes.

He did so. He had guessed what she had done, but he was surprised, nevertheless, to see the straight, slender, attractive girl who stood before him.

"You see, Xantra used this on me twice—the latter time to restore me, so I would be able to see him. I watched him carefully," the girl explained.

Clee gazed at Vivian in greatest confusion. Why—she was beautiful! He grew conscious of a growing need

to say something, and eventually the asinine thing that left his lips was:

"Yes—you—you aren't bad looking at all."

The girl turned away, blushing; and it was Jim who relieved Clee from his awkward situation. He came swinging happily through the alcove portal to suddenly stop in blank surprise. Clee had disappeared!

It did not take long to restore Jim to his normal self, and Vivian and Clee laughed at the great sigh of relief he unconsciously gave when he found himself able to see the girl who before had been only a disembodied Voice to him. Clee explained to Vivian what had happened to them down below, and she in turn told them how she and Xantra had come to be unconscious when they reached the control alcove.

"I found the anaesthetic by its smell soon after I went to Xantra," she explained. "I tried to conceal it in my dress, but Xantra saw me and tried to take it away; and in the struggle that followed I guess we both got

anaesthetized. When I came to I saw you and Jim trying to hold back the slaves; and I could see Xantra on the floor, conscious—which you couldn't—and knew he was ordering the slaves on. So I told you, and—here we are!

"Do you want to see Xantra now?" she added.

Clee would never forget the sight of the bound figure that met his eyes on the floor on the large room. The clothes were odd; the figure was much that of a normal man, though the shoulders were more sloped and the head much larger; but it was the face, its expression, that held him.

Unhealthy, leprous-white was the skin, and there was not one hair, eyelash or eyebrow on the whole head. The closed eyes lay in deep caverns surrounded by a thousand fine wrinkles, which crisscrossed all over his face in every direction. The face and head were freakish—monstrous; and yet, somehow, over it rested an expression of infinite wisdom and calm. He lay bound and still and unconscious, at the mercy of men far below him intellectually, this man from another

planet. Clee could not help but compare him to a stoical man staked out on an anthill to die....

"We'll have to keep him unconscious with the anaesthetic," he said at length; "he's too dangerous to monkey with. And that means we've got to find out how to run this ship—take it back ourselves."

"Leave that to me!" said Jim, feeling quite chipper. "Never saw anything yet I couldn't drive. Where is it—Cape Cod, you want to be let off, Miss Gray?... O. K. This is my joy-ride, and I'll see that you're delivered at your front door."

More than two days later, again at night, the few look-outs on the lonely fishing craft off Cape Cod might have seen a pinpoint of cherry-red appear off the eastern horizon and make a wide arc up the heavens.

Its course was erratic, and it made sudden angles as it drew near the zenith. It glowed more and more brightly as it approached—until it disappeared from sight overhead.

For some minutes it was invisible; and then, suddenly, only a few hundred yards overhead, it emerged into view again, a great sphere of faintly glowing, cherry-red crystal. Rapidly—with dangerous speed—it descended, straight for the shore-line of Massachusetts Bay. And as it neared, its erratic side-to-side dashes increased, rather than diminished.

Down at a wide angle it came for the beach; then, when it was a hundred feet away, it sheared suddenly out to sea. There, only a few feet above the water, it darted to the side once more—and fell, and skipped along the water at dizzying speed.

But it did not go far. With its first contact with the water a great crack split the night air; and a little further, the ship split into hundreds of small pieces, all of which slid along the surface of the water until, their momentum lost, they came to a stop and slowly sank from view. A dozen figures were left threshing on the surface; but one by one they disappeared, till there were only four left. Then one of the four sank from sight....

Slowly but steadily the remaining three drew near to the welcoming shore, and at last stood dripping and tired on the sandy beach. For some time they stood there in silence, reviewing all the incredible adventure they had been through, as they gazed off across the water to the place where the slave ship had gone down.

But one of them—Jim—had something to say, and at last it came out.

"Well, I told you I'd drive you safely back!"

Clee, his arm around the waist of the exhausted Vivian, smiled and answered:

"But I don't see Vivian's front door."

"We're close enough!" Jim snorted. "After all, I did hit the Earth!"

96 The Revolt of the Machines by Nat Schachner and Arthur Leo Zagat

Something in the many-faceted mind of the master machine spurs it to diabolical revolt against the authority of its human masters.

Aproximate word count: 11,600

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

Prologue

For five thousand years, since that nigh legendary figure Einstein wrote and thought in the far-off mists of time, the scientists endeavored to reduce life and the universe to terms of a mathematical formula. And they thought they had succeeded. Throughout the world, machines did the work of man, and the aristos, owners of the machines, played in soft idleness in their crystal and gold pleasure cities. Even the prolat

hordes, relieved of all but an hour or two per day of toil, were content in their warrens—content with the crumbs of their masters.

Then the ice began to move, down from the north and up from the south. Slowly, inexorably, the jaws of the great vise closed, till all that was left of the wide empire of man was a narrow belt about the equator. Everywhere else was a vast tumbled waste of cold and glaring whiteness, a frozen desert. In the narrow habitable belt were compacted the teeming millions of earth's peoples.

In spite of the best efforts of the scientists among them, the crowding together of the myriads of earth's inhabitants brought in its train the inevitable plagues of famine and disease. Even with the most intensive methods of cultivation, even with the synthetic food factories running day and night, there could not be produced enough to sustain life in the hordes of prolats. And with the lowering of resistance and the lack of sufficient sanitary arrangements, disease began to spread with ever increasing rapidity and virulence.

The aristos trembled, for they were few, and the prolats many. Already were arising loud and disheveled orators, inciting the millions to arise against their masters. The aristos were few, but they were not helpless. In the blackness of a moonless, clouded night there was a whispering of many wings, and from dark shapes that loomed against the dark sky, great beams swept over the tented fields where the prolats lay huddled and sleeping. And when the red sun circled the ice-chained earth he found in his path heaps of dust where on his last journey he had warmed the swarming millions.

The slaves thus ruthlessly destroyed could well be spared, for the machines did the work of the world, even to the personal care of the aristos' pampered bodies. Only for direction, and starting and stopping, was the brain and the hand of man required. Now that the inhabited portion of the terrestrial globe was so straitly circumscribed, radio power waves, television and radio-phone, rendered feasible the control of all the machines from one central station, built at the edge of the Northern Glacier. Here were

brought the scant few of the prolats that had been spared, a pitiful four hundred men and women, and they were set to endless, thankless tasks.

I was one of those few; and Keston, my friend, who was set at the head of the force. I was second in command. For a decade we labored, whipped our fellows to their tasks, that the aristos might loll careless in the perfume and silks of their pleasure palaces, or riot in wild revel, to sink at last in sodden stupor. Sprawled thus they would lie, until the dressing machines we guided would lift them gently from their damasked couches, bathe them with warm and fragrant waters, clothe their soft carcasses in diaphanous, iridescent webs, and start them on a new day of debauchery.

But the slow vengeance of an inscrutable Omnipotence they mockingly denied overtook them at last, and I saw the rendering and payment of the long past due account.

As I entered the vast domed hall wherein all my waking hours were spent, the shrill whistle of an

alarm signal told me that something had been wrong. Instinctively I looked toward the post of Abud. Three times in the past week had Keston or I been called upon for swift action to right some error of that dull witted prolat. On the oval visor-screen above the banked buttons of his station I saw the impending catastrophe. Two great freight planes, one bearing the glowing red star that told of its cargo of highly explosive terminite, were approaching head-on with lightning rapidity. The fool had them on the same level.

Abud was gaping now at the screen in paralyzed fright, with no idea of how to avoid the cataclysm. Just below I glimpsed the soaring towers of Antarcha. In a moment that gold and crystal pleasure city would be blasted to extinction, with all its sleeping thousands. Swift would be the vengeance of the aristos. Already I could see Abud and Keston and a hundred others melting in the fierce rays of the Death Bath!

But, even as my face blanched with the swift and terrible vision, the little controller's car ground to a

smoking stop at Abud's back. With one motion Keston's lithe form leaped from his seat and thrust aside the gaping prolat. His long white fingers darted deftly over the gleaming buttons. The red starred plane banked in a sudden swerve; the other dipped beneath. Distinct from the speaker beneath the screen came the whoosh of the riven air as the fliers flashed past, safe by a margin of scant feet. Another rippling play of the prolat chief's fingers and the planes were back on their proper courses. The whistle ceased its piercing alarm, left a throbbing stillness.

Chief Keston turned to the brute faced culprit. Cold contempt tautened the thin, ascetic features of his face. Somehow I was at his side: I must have been running across the wide floor of the Control Station while the crisis had flared and passed. In measured tones, each word a cutting whip-lash, came his well merited rebuke:

"Don't try me too far, Abud. Long before this I should have relieved you of your post, and ordered you to the Death Bath. I am derelict in my duty that I do not do so. By my weak leniency I imperil the lives of your

comrades, and my own. It is your good fortune that a Council delegate has not been present at one of your exhibitions. But I dare not risk more. Let the warning whistle come from your station just once again and I shall report you as an incompetent. You know the law."

I looked to see the man cringe in abasement and contrition. But the heavy jaw thrust forth in truculent defiance; hate blazed forth from the deep-set eyes; the florid features were empurpled with rage. He made as if to reply, but turned away from the withering scorn in Keston's face.

"Ha, Meron, here at last." A warm smile greeted me. "I've been waiting for you impatiently."

"I'm an hour before my time," I replied, then continued, exasperatedly: "Chief, I hope this latest imbecility will convince you that you ought to turn him in. I know it hurts you to condemn a prolat to the Death Bath, but if you let him go on, his mistakes will bring us all to that end."

I glanced toward where a black portal broke the circle of switchboards, and shuddered. Behind that grim gate leaped and flared eternally the flame of the consuming Ray, the exhaust flue of the solar energy by which the machines were fed. Once I had seen a condemned man step through that aperture at the order of an aristo whom he had offended. For a moment his tortured body had glowed with a terrible golden light. Then—there was nothing.

My friend pressed my arm, calmly. Again he smiled. "Come, come, Meron, don't get all worked up. It isn't his fault. Why, look at him. Can't you see that he is a throwback, lost in this world of science and machines? Besides"—his voice dropped low—"it doesn't matter any more. Man-failure will no longer trouble the even tenor of the machines. I've finished."

A tremor of excitement seized me. "You've completed it at last? And it works?"

"It works. I tested it when the shifts changed at midnight; kept the oncoming force outside for five minutes. It works like a charm."

"Great! When will you tell the Council?"

"I've already sent the message off. You know how hard it is to get them away from their wines and their women—but they'll be here soon. But before they come, I've something to tell you. Let's go back behind the screens."

As we walked toward the huge tarpaulin-screened mass that bulked in the center of the great chamber, I glanced around the hall, at the thousand-foot circle of seated prolats. Two hundred men and women were there; two hundred more were sleeping in the dormitories. These were all that were left of the world's workers. Before each operative rose the serried hundreds of pearl buttons, dim lit, clicking in and out under the busy fingers. Above each, an oval visor-screen with its flitting images brought across space the area the switches controlled. Every one of the ten score was watching his screen with taut attention, and listening to the voices of the machines there depicted—the metallic voices from the radio speakers broadcasting their needs.

The work was going on as it had gone on for ten years, with the omnipresent threat of the Death Bath whipping flagged, tired brains to dreary energy. The work kept going on till they dropped worn out at last in their tired seats. Only in Keston's brain, and in mine, flamed the new hope of release. Tomorrow the work would be done, forever. Tomorrow, we would be released, to take our places in the pleasure palaces. To loll at ease, breathing the sweet perfume of idleness, waited on by machines directed by a machine.

For, as we stood behind the heavy canvas folds that Keston had drawn aside, there towered, fifty feet above me, halfway to the arching roof, a machine that was the ultimate flowering of man's genius. Almost man-form it was—two tall metal cylinders supporting a larger, that soared aloft till far above it was topped by a many-faceted ball of transparent quartz. Again I had a fleeting, but vivid, impression of something baleful, threatening, about it. Small wonder, though. For the largest cylinder, the trunk of the man-machine Keston had created, was covered thick with dangling

arms. And the light of the xenon tube that flooded the screened space was reflected from the great glass head till it seemed that the thing was alive; that it was watching me till some unguarded moment would give it its chance.

A long moment we stood, going again over each detail of the thing, grown so familiar through long handling as it was slowly assembled. Then my friend's voice, low pitched as was its wont, dissipated the visions I was seeing. "Two hours ago, Meron, with none here but me to see, those arms were extended, each to its appointed station. And, as the sensitive cells in the head received the signals from the visor-screens and the radio-speakers the arms shot about the key-boards and pressed the proper buttons just as our men are doing now. The work of the world went on, without a falter, with only the master machine to direct it. Yet a year ago, when I first spoke to you of the idea, you told me it was impossible!"

"You have won," I responded; "you have taken the last step in the turning over of the functions of man to machines—the last step but one. Routine control, it is

true, can now be exercised by this—those fellows out there are no longer necessary—but there will still be the unexpected, unforeseen emergencies that will require human intelligence to meet and cope with them. You and I, I'm afraid, are still doomed to remain here and serve the machines."

Keston shook his head, while a little smile played over his sharp-featured face, and a glow of pride and triumph suffused his fine dark eyes. "Grumbling again, old carper. What would you say if I told you that I have solved even that problem? I have given my master machine intelligence!"

My wide-eyed, questioning stare must have conveyed my thought to him, for he laughed shortly, and said, "No, I've not gone insane."

"It was an accident," he went on with amazing calm. "My first idea was merely to build something that would reduce the necessary supervisory force to one or two humans. But, when I had almost completed my second experimental model, I found that I was out of the copper filaments necessary to wind a certain coil.

I didn't want to wait till I could obtain more from the stores, and remembered that on the inside of the door to the Death Bath there was some fine screening that could be dispensed with. I used the wire from that. Whether the secret of life as well as of death lies in those waste rays from the sun, or whether some unknown element of the humans consumed in the flame was deposited on the screening in a sort of invisible coating, I do not know. But this I do know: when that second model was finished, and the vitalizing current was turned on, things happened—queer things that could be explained only on the ground that the machine had intelligence."

He fell silent a moment, then his thin pale lips twisted in a wry smile. "You know, Meron, I was a little scared. The thing I had created seemed possessed of a virulent antagonism toward me. Look." He bared an arm and held it out. A livid weal ran clear around the fore-arm. "One of the tentacles I had given it whipped around my arm like a flash. If I had not cut off the current at once it might have squeezed through flesh and bone. The pressure was terrific."

I was about to speak, when from the screen nearest the entrance door a beam of green light darted out, vanished, came again. Once, twice, three times.

"Look, Chief, the signal. They're coming. The Council will soon be here."

"They're over-prompt. My message must have aroused their curiosity. But listen:

"I incorporated my new thought coil, as I called it, in the large master machine. But I don't know just what will happen when the current flows through that. So I shunted it. The machine will work, routinely, without it. There is a button that will bring it into action. When I shall have taken the proper precautions I will switch it on, and then we shall see what happens."

We saw, sooner than Keston expected.

Again the green beam flashed out. The great portals slowly opened. Through them glided the three travel cars of the Supreme Council of the aristos.

It had been almost a year since I saw them, the Over Lords of the World, and I had forgotten their appearance. Sprawled on the glowing silks of their cushioned couches, eyes closed in languid boredom, they were like huge white slugs. Swollen to tremendous size by the indolent luxuriousness of their lives, the flesh that was not concealed by the bright hued web of their robes was pasty white, and bagged and folded where the shrunken muscles beneath refused support. Great pouches dropped beneath swollen eyelids. Full-lipped, sensual mouths and pendulous cheeks merged into the great fat rolls of their chins. I shuddered. These, these were the masters for whom we slaved!

As we bent low the gliding cars came to rest, and a warm redolence of sweet perfume came to me from the fans softly whirling in the canopies over the aristos' heads. Strains of music rose and fell, and ceased as a flat, tired voice breathed: "Rise, prolats."

I straightened up. The eyes of the Council were now opened, little pig's eyes almost lost in the flesh about them. They glinted with a cold, inhuman cruelty. I

shuddered, and thought of the night of terror ten years before. And suddenly I was afraid, deathly afraid.

Ladnom Atuna, head of the Council, spoke again. "We have come at your petition. What is this matter so grave that it has led you to disturb us at our pleasures?"

Keston bowed low. "Your Excellency, I would not have presumed to intrude upon you for a small matter. I have so greatly ventured because I have at length solved the final step in the mechanization of the world. I have invented a master machine to operate the switchboards in this hall and replace the workers thereat."

The flabby faces of the aristos betrayed not the slightest interest, not the least surprise. Only Atuna spoke: "Interesting, if true. Can you prove your statement?"

Keston strode to the canvas screen and pulled a cord. The great canvas curtains rolled back. "Here is the

machine, my Lords!" His face was lit with the glow of pride of achievement. His voice had lost its reverence. Rapidly he continued: "The head of this contrivance is a bank of photo and sono-electric cells, each facet focussed on one of the screens. Through a nerve-system of copper filaments any combination of lights and sounds will actuate the proper arm which will shoot out to the required bank of buttons and press the ones necessary to meet any particular demand. That is all the prolats are doing out there, and they make mistakes, while my master machine cannot. The —"

But Ladnom Atuna raised a languid hand. "Spare us these technical explanations. They bore us. All we desire to know is that the machine will do as you say."

The chief flushed, and gulped. His triumph was not meeting with the acclaim he had expected. But he bowed. "Very well. With your gracious permission I shall demonstrate its operation." Atuna nodded in acquiescence.

Keston's voice rang out in crisp command. "Attention,

prolats. Cease working." The long circling row suddenly jerked around; their flying fingers halted their eternal dartings. "Quickly, down to the space in front of the door to the Death Bath." A rush of hurried feet. These men and women were accustomed to instant, unquestioning obedience. "Absolute silence. Keep clear of the floor on peril of your lives."

The chief wheeled to the master machine and pressed a button. Instantly, the hundreds of dangling arms telescoped out, each to a button bank where a moment before a prolat had labored. And, with a weird simulation of life, the ten forked ends of each arm commenced a rattling pressing of the buttons. Rapidly, purposefully, the metallic fingers moved over the key-boards, and on the screens we could see that the machines all over the world were continuing on their even course. Not the slightest change in their working betrayed the fact that they were now being directed by a machine instead of human beings. A great surge of admiration swept me at the marvelous accomplishment of my friend.

Not so the aristos. Expressionless, they watched as

the maze of stretching tentacles vibrated through the crowded air. Yet not quite expressionless. I thought I could sense in the covert glances they cast at one another a crafty weighing of the implications of this machine; a question asked and answered; a decision made. Then their spokesman turned languidly to the waiting, triumphant figure of Keston.

"Evidently your claims are proven. This means that the force of prolat operatives are no longer necessary."

"Yes, Your Excellency. They may now be released to a well earned reward."

The aristo ignored the interruption. "We take it that only two will now be required to operate this Control Station, to supply the last modicum of human intelligence required to meet unforeseen emergencies."

I saw that Keston was about to interrupt once more, to tell the Council of the thought coil, the most unbelievable part of the miracle he had wrought. But

something seemed to warn me that he should not speak. Standing behind him I nudged him, while I myself replied: "Yes, Your Excellency." The chief flung me a startled look, but did not correct me.

From the packed crowd of prolats at the other end of the hall I could hear a murmuring. While I could not make out the words, the very tones told me that in the hearts of those weary slaves new hope was rising, the same hope that glowed in Keston's face. But I was oppressed by an unreasoning fear.

Atuna was still talking, in his cold, unemotional monotone. "This being so, hear now our decision. Keston and Meron, you will remain here to meet all emergencies. You others, your function is done. You have done your work well, you are now no longer needed to control the machines. Therefore,"—he paused, and my heart almost stopped—"therefore, being no longer of value, you will be disposed of."

A click sounded loud through the stunned silence. Beyond the white crowd the huge black portal slid slowly open. A shimmering radiance of glowing

vapors blazed from the space beyond.

"Prolats, file singly into the Death Bath!" Atuna raised his voice only slightly with the command. I glanced at Keston. He was livid with fury.

Incredible as it may seem, so ingrained was the habit of obedience to the aristos in the prolats that not even a murmur of protest came from the condemned beings. The nearest man to the flaming death stepped out into the void. His doomed body flared, then vanished. The next moved to his turn.

But suddenly a great shout rang out.

"Stop!"

It was Keston's voice, but so changed, so packed with fury and outrage, that I scarcely recognized it.

His spare, tall form was drawn tensely straight as he shook a clenched fist at the Council. He was quivering with anger, and his eyes blazed.

"Aristos, you do wrong! These men have served you faithfully and well. I demand for them the reward they have earned—rest and leisure, and the pleasures that for ten years they have seen you enjoy while they worked here for you. They have worked for you, I say, and now that I have released them you would destroy them. Aristos, I demand justice!"

For the first time I saw expression on the flaccid faces of the Council—surprise and astonishment that a prolet should dare dispute an aristo command. Then a sneer twisted Atuna's countenance.

"What is this? Who are you to demand anything from us? We spared these prolats because we needed them: we need them no longer, hence they must die. What madness has seized you? Reward! Justice! For prolats! As well say we should reward the stone walls of our houses; dispense justice to the machines. Proceed, prolats!"

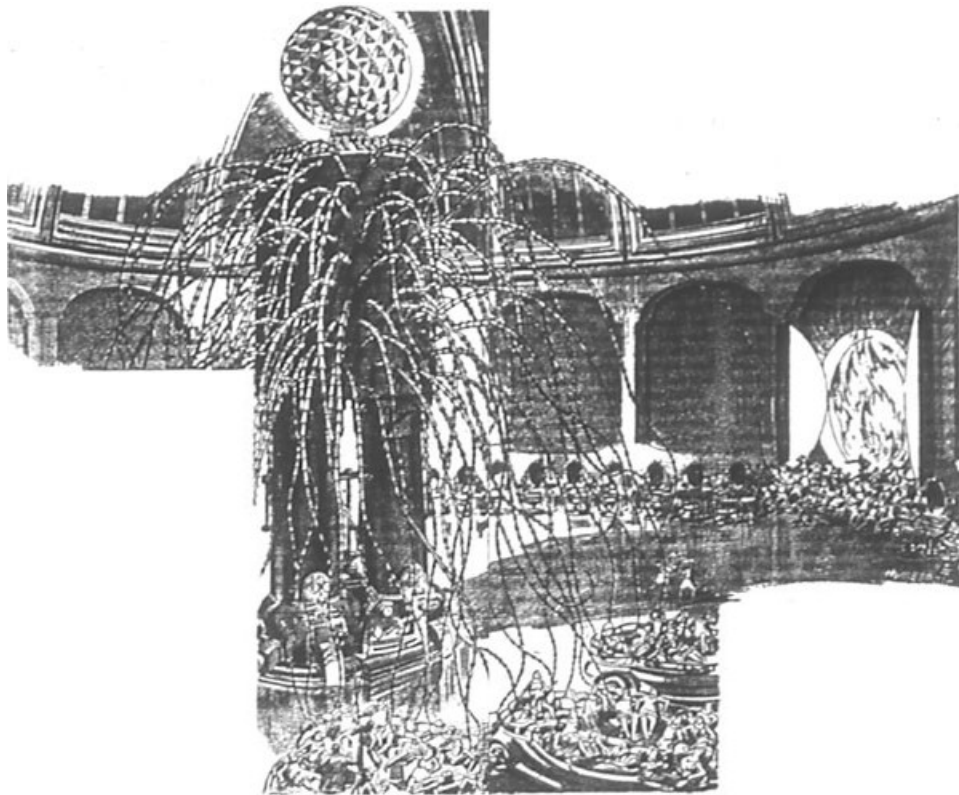
Keston made as if to spring for the aristo's throat. I put out a hand to stop him. An invisible shield of death rays rimmed the platforms the Council used. It

was suicide! But suddenly he turned and sprang to the master machine. He grasped a switch lever and threw it down.

A long tentacle left its keys and swished menacingly through the air. "Meron, prolats, under the key-boards!" came Keston's shout. I dived to obey. Steel fingers clutched my jerkin and tore it loose as I landed with a thud against the wall. Keston thumped alongside of me. He was breathing heavily and his face was deathly pale.

"Look!" he gasped.

Out on the floor was a shambles. I saw one snakelike arm whip around the stout form of Atuna, then tighten. A shriek of agony rang through the hall. Another tentacle curled about the couch of a second aristo, pinning the occupant to it. Then couch and all were swung a hundred feet in the air to be crashed down with terrific force on the stone floor. Two arms seized the third at the same time....



"Too sluggish to get out of the way in time, damn them!" I heard Keston mutter. True, but not all the prolats had moved fast enough at the warning shout. Cowering under the saving key-boards, shrinking from the metallic arms not quite long enough to reach them, I could count only a score. The others—but what use to describe the slaughter out there! I see it in nightmares too often.

A thunder from the speakers grew till it drowned out the agonized shrieks in the great hall. On the screens

horror flared. All over the world, it appeared, the machines had gone mad. I saw Antarcha crash as a dozen air freighters plunged through the crystal towers. I saw a huge dredge strip the roof from a great playhouse, and smash the startled crowd within with stones it plucked from an embankment. I saw untenanted land cars shooting wild through packed streets. Great ponderous tractors left the fields and moved in ordered array on the panic-stricken cities. Methodically they pursued the fleeing aristos, and crushed them beneath their tread like scurrying ants.

I realized that the scraping of the tentacles reaching for us had ceased, that the arms had all returned to the button banks. Then it dawned on me that Keston's master machine was directing all the destruction I was watching, that the intelligence he had given it was being used to divert the machines from their regular tasks to—conquer the world. "You sure started something, Keston," I said.

"Yes," he gasped, white-faced, "something that I should have expected when that model machine went for me. Do you understand? I've given the machines

intelligence, created a new race, and they are trying to wipe out the humans; conquer the world for themselves. The possibility flashed on me when I was half-mad with rage and disappointment at the callous cruelty of the aristo Council. I threw that switch with the thought that it would be far better for all of us to be wiped out. But now, I don't know. After all, they are men, like ourselves, and it hurts to see our own race annihilated. If only I can get to that switch."

He started to push out from under the scant shelter, but an alert tentacle hissed through the air in a swift stab at him, and he dodged back, hopelessly.

"Don't be a damn fool," I snapped at him. "Forget that mushy sentimentality. Even if you save the aristos, we're due for extinction just the same. Better that the whole human race be wiped out together."

Then a thought struck me. "Maybe we have a chance to get out of this ourselves."

"Impossible. Where could we hide from the machines?" He waved a hand at the screens. "Look."

"The Glacier, man, the Glacier!" He started. "There are no machines out there. If we can get to the ice we are safe."

"But the aircraft will find us."

"They won't know we're there. There are no microphones or radio-eyes in the wastes."

A rough voice came from the cowering files behind us. "Hey, Keston, let's get a move on. You're the smart guy around here: get us out of this mess you've started."

It was Abud. When so many better prolats had perished, he was alive and whole.

We got out, crawling under the key-boards till we could make a dash for the door. We emerged into a world ablaze with the light of many fires, and reverberating with the far off crashing of destruction. To the right we could see the tumbled remains of what a short hour before had been our barracks. Two digging machines were still ponderously moving

about among the ruins, pounding down their heavy buckets methodically, reducing the concrete structure to a horrible dead level. Ten score prolats had been sleeping there when I left.

As we rushed into the open, the machines turned and made for us; but they had not been built for speed, and we easily outdistanced them. The rest of that day will always remain a dim haze to me. I can remember running, running, Abud's broad form always in the lead. I can remember long minutes of trembling under tangled underbrush, while from above sounded the burring of an air machine searching ceaselessly for us. I can remember seeing at last the tall white ramparts of the Glacier. Then a blackness swallowed me up, hands tugged at me, and I knew no more....

The great white waste of hummocky ice dazzled under the blinding sun. My eyes were hurting terribly. There was a great void in my stomach. For two days I had not eaten.

Keston, tottering weakly at my side, was in an even worse state. His trembling hand could scarcely hold

the primitive bone-tipped spear. God knows I had difficulty enough with mine.

Yet, tired, hungry, shivering as we were, we forced our dragging feet along, searching the interminable expanse for sign of polar bear or the wild white dogs that hunted in packs. We had to find flesh—any kind—to feed our shriveled stomachs—or go under.

Keston uttered a weak shout. I looked. From behind a frozen hummock a great white bear padded. He saw us, sniffed the air a moment, then turned contemptuously away. He must have sensed our weakness.

Almost crying in his eagerness, Keston raised his spear and cast it with what strength he had at the animal that meant food and warmth for our bodies.

The weapon described a slow arc, and caught the shaggy bear flush in the shoulder. But there had been no force behind the throw. The sharpened bone tip stuck in the flesh, quivered a bit, and dropped harmlessly to the ice.

Aroused, the creature whirled about. We caught a glimpse of small, vindictive eyes. Then, with a roar, it made for us.

"Look out!" I cried. Keston started to run, but I knew he could not match the wounded animal in speed. I threw my futile spear, but the bear shook it off as though it were a pin prick, and would not be diverted from his prey.

I ran after, shouting for help. Then Keston stumbled and went down in a sprawl on the rough gray ice. The bear was almost on him and there was nothing I could do.

When the figure of a man darted from behind a sheltering mound. It was Abud, swathed in warm white furs, brawny of body, strong, well fed, heavy jowled. He swung easily a long spear, far heavier than ours, and pointed with keen barbs.

He stopped short at the sight of us, and his brutal features contorted in merriment. The desperate plight of my friend seemed to afford him infinite amusement.

Nor did he make any move to help.

I shouted to him. "Quick, kill it before it's too late!"

"So it is Abud you turn to now," he sneered heavily.

"Abud, whom you thought deserving of the Death Bath not so long ago. No, my fine friends, let me see you help yourselves, you two who thought you were king pins down in the valley. Men? Bah! Weaklings, that's all you are!"

I ran blindly over the uneven ice, unarmed, some crazy notion in my mind of tackling the brute with bare fists, to drag him off my friend. Abud shouted with laughter, leaning on his spear.

For some strange animal reason, the mocking laughter enraged the bear. He had almost reached the motionless figure of Keston when he swerved suddenly, and made for Abud.

The ghastly merriment froze on the heavy jowled man. Like lightning he lifted his heavy lance, and drove it with a powerful arm squarely into the breast

of the advancing brute. It sank a full foot into the blubbery flesh, and, while the stricken bear clawed vainly at the wound and sought to push himself along toward the man, Abud held the spear firmly as in a vise, so that the animal literally impaled itself. With a gush of blood, it sank motionless to the ground.

Abud plucked the spear away with a dexterous twist.

Keston was feebly groping to his feet. I was torn between joy at his deliverance and rage at the inhuman callousness of Abud.

The latter grinned at us hatefully.

"You see what poor weakling creatures you are," he jeered. "Good for nothing but to push a lot of senseless buttons. Down there you were the bosses, the ones to look upon me as dirt. Here, on the ice, where it takes guts to get along, I am the boss. I let you live on my scraps and leavings, simply because it tickled me to see you cringe and beg. But I am growing weary of that sport. Henceforth you keep away from my camp. Don't let me catch you prowling

around, d'you hear? Let's see how long you'll last on the ice!"

"This animal is mine." He prodded the carcass. "I killed it. I'll make the prolats skin and, cut it up for me. Ho-ho, how they cringe and obey me—Abud, the dull one! Ho-ho!"

On this he strode away, still laughing thunderously.

I looked to Keston in blank dismay. What was to be our fate now, but death by cold and slow starvation!

Three-months had passed since we had escaped to the ice from the dreadful machines—a score of us. For a while it seemed that we had fled in vain. We were not fit to cope with the raw essentials of life: it was uncounted centuries since man fought nature bare handed. So we huddled together for warmth, and starved. Even Keston's keen brain was helpless in this waste of ice, without tools, without machines.

When it was that Abud arose to take command. He, dull brute that he was amid the complexities of our

civilization, fairly reveled in this primitive combat with hunger and cold. He was an anachronism in our midst, a throwback to our early forebears.

It did not take him long to fashion cunning nooses and traps to catch the few beasts that roamed the ice. Once he pounced upon a wolf-like creature, and strangled it with bare hands. He fashioned with apt fingers spears and barbs of bone, curved knives from shin bones, and skinned the heavy fur pelts and made them into garments.

No wonder the prolats in their helplessness looked to him as their leader. Keston and I were thrust aside. But Abud did not forget. His slow witted mind harbored deadly rancor for former days, when we were in command. He remembered our contempt for his slow dull processes; for the many errors he was guilty of. By a queer quirk, the very fact that Keston had saved him from the Death Bath on several occasions but fed the flames of his hatred. Perhaps that was an ancient human trait, too.

So he set himself to twit and humiliate us. His jibes

were heavy handed and gross. He refused to let us eat at the communal mess, but forced us to wait until all were through, when he tossed us a few scraps as though we were dogs.

Many times I started up in hot rage, ready to match my softened muscles against his brawn. But always Keston caught me in time and whispered patience. Some plan was taking shape in his mind, I could see, so I stopped short, and was content to bide my time.

Now we were through, discarded, as a last brutal gesture. What was there to be done now?

In utter silence I looked at Keston. To my great surprise he did not seem downcast. Quite the contrary. His eyes were sparkling, once more alive with the red fire. The weariness was gone from him; there was energy, decision stamped on his finely cut features.

"Now is our time to act," he said. "I've been hesitating too long."

"What are you talking about?"

"Abud forced my hand," Keston explained. "You didn't think we were going to live here in this fashion the rest of our lives? I'd rather die now than have such a future staring me in the face. No, we're going down into the valley to fight the machines."

I stared at him aghast. "Man, you're crazy. They'd crush us in a minute!"

"Maybe," he said unconcernedly. "But we have no time to lose. Abud will be back with the prolats, and we'll have to clear out before then. Quick—cut off a few chunks of meat. We'll need them."

"But Abud will kill us when he finds out what's been done."

"And we'll starve if we don't."

Which was an unanswerable argument. So with our bone knives we hacked off gobs of the still warm flesh, covered with great layers of fat.

Looking up from my task, I saw black figures coming toward us from the direction of the camp. They quickened into a run even as I noticed them—Abud and the prolats.

"Quick, Keston," I cried, "they're coming."

Keston glanced around and started to run. I followed as fast as I could.

"They'll catch us," I panted. "Where can we hide?"

"Down in the valley."

"But the machines will get us then."

"Save your breath and follow me. I know a place."

We were racing along as fast as our weakened legs could carry us, toward the edge of the Glacier. I looked back to see Abud, his brute face distorted with rage, gaining rapidly on us. The other prolats were being outdistanced.

Abud shouted threateningly for us to stop, but that only made us re-double our efforts. I knew he would kill us if he caught up with us. He had his spear and we were without ours.

The steep terminus of the great Northern Glacier hove into view. Far below was the broad fertile habitable belt, stretching as far as the eye could see. A lump rose in my throat as I ran. It was our earth, our heritage down there—and here we were, fleeing for our lives, dispossessed by bits of metal and quartz, machines that we had fashioned.

Hovering in the air, on a level with us, were scout planes, vigilant guardians of the frontier.

Once a prolet had become crazed by the eternal ice and cold, and had ventured down the side of the Glacier, to reach the warm lands his thin blood hungered for. As soon as he had painfully clambered to the bottom, within the area of the televisions, a plane had swooped and crushed him, while we, lining the edge, had witnessed the horror helplessly.

Yet Keston ran on confidently. Abud was just a little way behind, bellowing exultantly, when we came to the jumping-off place. He was sure he had us now.

Keston slid from view. It was sheer suicide to go down there, I knew; yet, to remain where I was, meant certain death. Abud's spear was already poised to thrust. There was only one thing to do, and I did it. I threw myself over the rim, just where Keston had disappeared.

I landed with a thud on a narrow ledge of ice. The surface was glassy smooth, and I started slipping straight toward the outer edge, a sheer drop of a thousand feet to the valley below. I strove to recover my balance, but only accelerated my progress. Another moment and I would have plunged into the abyss, but a hand reached out and grabbed me just in time. It was Keston.

"Hold tight and follow me," he whispered urgently, "we've no time to lose. The master machine is seeing us now in the visor screen, and will act."

I had an impulse to turn back, but Abud's face was leering down at us.

"I'll get you for this!" he screamed, and let himself down heavily over the ledge.

Keston edged his way along the treacherous trail, I after him. It was ticklish work. A misstep, and there would be nothing to break our fall.

I heard a siren sound, then another; and another. I wasted a precious moment to look up. A scout plane was diving for us, on a terrific slant. The air was black with aircraft converging on us. The master machine had seen us! I sensed utter malevolence in the speed of these senseless metals, thrown at us by the thing my friend had created.

But there was no time for thought. In desperate haste, we inched our way along. Abud had seen the peril, too, and lost all his truculence in the face of the greater danger. He clawed after us, intent only on reaching whatever safety we were heading for.

I could hear the zoom of the great wings when the path took a sudden turn and we catapulted headlong into a black cavern thrusting into the ice.

We were not an instant too soon. For a giant shape swooped by our covert with a terrifying swoosh, inches away from Abud's leg as he dived after us, and it was followed by a grinding crash. The machine had been directed too close to the ice and had smashed into bits.

We crouched there a moment, panting, struggling to regain our wind. Keston had regained the air of quiet power he had once possessed. Quietly he spoke to our enemy.

"Listen to me, Abud. Up there on the ice, you played the bully, relying on your brute strength. Here, however, we're up against the machines, and your intelligence is of too low an order to compete with them. You need my brains now. If you expect to escape from them, and live, you'll have to do exactly as I say. I'm boss, do you understand?"

I expected a roar of rage at Keston's calm assertion, and quietly got in back of Abud ready to jump him if he made a threatening move.

But the big brute was a creature of abject terror, staring out with fear-haunted eyes. Quite humbly he replied: "You are right. You are the only one who can beat the machines. I'll follow you in everything."

"Very well, then. This cave leads through a series of tunnels down through the ice to the bottom of the valley. I explored it nights when you were all sleeping."

I looked at him in amazement. I had not known anything about his midnight wanderings. He saw my glance.

"I'm sorry, Meron, but I thought it wiser to say nothing of my plans, even to you, until they had matured. Let us go."

Outside hundreds of craft were hurtling across the opening. Escape that way was clearly impossible.

"No doubt the master machine is hurrying over high explosives to blast us out," Keston said indifferently; "but we won't be here."

We started down a tortuous decline, crawling on hands and knees. We had not progressed very far when we heard a thud and a roar behind us, followed by a series of crashes.

"Just as I thought. The master machine is firing terminate into the cavern. What a high degree of intelligence that thing has! Too bad we'll have to smash it." He sighed. I verily believe he hated to destroy this brain child of his. Yet just how he was going to do it, I did not know.

There passed hours of weary, tortured stumblings, and slitherings, and sudden falls—down, always down, interminably. A pale glimmering showed us the way, a dim shining through the icy walls.

At last, faint with toil, bleeding and torn from glass-sharp splinters, we reached a level chamber, vaulted, surprisingly, with solid rock. It was good to see

something of the earth again, something that was not that deadly, all-embracing ice. At the far end lay a blinding patch. I blinked.

"Sunlight!" I shouted joyously.

"Yes," Keston answered quietly. "That opening leads directly into the valley on our land."

Abud roused himself from the unreasoning dread he had been in. It was the first time he had spoken.

"Let us get out of here. I feel as though I'm in a tomb."

"Are you mad?" Keston said sharply. "The visors would pick you up at once. You wouldn't last very long."

Abud stopped suddenly. There was a plaintive, helpless note to him. "But we can't stay here forever. We'd starve, or die of cold. Isn't there some way to get back to the top of the Glacier?"

"No—only the way we came. And that's been blocked

with terminite."

"Then what are we going to do? You've led us into a slow death, you with your boasted brains!"

"That remains to be seen," was the calm retort. "In the meantime, we're hungry. Let us eat."

And the amazing man drew out of his torn flapping furs the gobs of meat he had cut from the dead bear. I had quite forgotten them. With a glad cry, I too reached into my garments and brought out my supply.

Abud's eyes glinted evilly. His hand stole stealthily to the bone knife in its skin sheath. His spear had been dropped long before.

"None of that," Keston said sharply. "We'll all share equally, even though you have no food. But if you try to hog it all, or use force, you'll die as well as we. There's only enough for a meal or two; and then what will you do?"

Abud saw that. He needed Keston's brains. His eyes

dropped, and he mumbled something about our misunderstanding his gesture. We let it go at that. We had to. He could have killed us both if he wished.

So we divided our food with painstaking fairness. How we gorged on the raw red flesh and thick greasy fat! Food that would have disgusted us when we lived and worked in the Central Station, now was ambrosia to our sharpened appetites. When not the least scrap was left, and we had slaked our thirst with chunks of ice from the cavern floor, I spoke.

"What is that plan you spoke of, Keston, for reconquering the earth from the machines?"

Abud looked up abruptly at my question, and it seemed to me that a crafty smile glinted in the small pig eyes.

Keston hesitated a moment before he spoke.

"I confess my plans have been materially impeded by this sudden predicament we find ourselves in, thanks to our good friend here." He ironically indicated

Abud.

The big prolet merely grunted.

"However," Keston continued, "I'll have to make the best of circumstances, without the aid of certain materials that I had expected to assemble.

"The idea is a simple one. You've noted no doubt how the terminus of the Glacier opposite the Central Control Station overhangs. The brow, over a thousand feet up, extends out at least a hundred feet beyond the base."

I nodded assent, though Abud seemed startled. Many times had Keston and I speculated on the danger of an avalanche at this point, and wondered why the Station had been built in such an exposed place. Once indeed we had ventured to suggest to the aristocratic Council the advisability of removing the Central Control to some other point, but the cold silence that greeted our diffident advice deterred us from further pursuit of the subject.

"Now, you know as well as I," Keston resumed, "that a glacier is merely a huge river of ice, and, though solid, partakes of some of the qualities of freely flowing water. As a matter of fact, glaciers do flow, because the tremendous pressure at the bottom lowers the melting point of ice to such a degree that the ice actually liquefies, and flows along."

I followed him eagerly in these elementary statements, trying to glimpse what he was driving at, but Abud's brute features were fixed in a blank stare.

"This glacier does move. We've measured it—a matter of an inch or two a day. If, however,"—Keston's voice took on a deeper note—"we can manage to hasten that process, the Glacier will overwhelm the countryside."

He paused, and that gave me a chance to interpose some objections.

"But hold on a moment. In the first place it is an absolute impossibility with the means at our command, or even with every appliance, to melt the

face of the whole Northern Glacier. In the second place, even if we could, the whole world would be overwhelmed, and then where would we be?"

Keston looked at me a trifle scornfully. "Who said we were going to melt the entire glacier? Remember I spoke only of the place of the overhang. Set that in motion, and we don't have to worry about the problem any further."

"Why not?" I inquired incredulously. "Suppose you do wipe out all the machines in this particular vicinity, won't there be tremendous numbers left all through the Equatorial Belt?"

"Of course," he explained patiently, "and what if they are? What are all these machines but inanimate mechanisms, things of metal and rubber and quartz. What makes them the monsters they have become?"

I smote my forehead in anger. "What a fool! Now I see it. It's the master machine you're after."

"Exactly," he smilingly agreed. "Overwhelm, destroy

this devilish creature of mine, with its unhuman intelligence, and the machines are what they were before: merely obedient slaves."

I pondered that a moment. "And how, may I ask, are you going to force this old Glacier to move."

His face clouded. "That's the trouble. Up on the ice I was working on that problem, and had managed secretly to rig up a contrivance that would have done the trick. But we can't go back for it. That way is blocked." He mused, half to himself. "If only we could lay our hands on a solar disintegrating machine, the difficulty would be solved."

At the name, Abud's face, that had been a study in blank incomprehension, lit up.

"Solar disintegrating machine?" he inquired. "Why there's one stationed not more than a few hundred yards away from here. This area, 2-RX, was my sector, you know."

"Of course, of course," shouted Keston, "I'd quite

forgotten. The very thing. You're not half bad, Abud, if you'd only stop trying to rely on brute strength instead of brains," he concluded.

Abud said nothing, but I noticed a quick flash of hatred that passed in an instant, leaving a blank countenance. I thought to myself, "You'll bear watching, my fine fellow. I don't trust you at all."

Keston was speaking. "We'll have to wait until nightfall. The master machine won't expect us down at the base, so I'm positive the search-rays won't be focussed along the ground. We'll sneak to the machine, smash its visor and radio units, so it won't give the alarm, and haul it back. Then I'll show you what's next to be done."

Night came at last, leaden footed, though we were burning with impatience. Very softly we crawled out of the cave, three shadows. Fortunately there was no moon. The great Glacier loomed ominously above us, dimly white. High overhead hovered the green signal lights of the machine planes, their search rays focussed in blinding glares on the rim of the upper

ice.

It did not take us long to find the dark bulk of the disintegrator. It was a squat cylinder, for all the world like a huge boiler. At one end there up-ended a periscope arrangement which broadened out to a funnel. In the funnel was a very powerful lens, cut to special measurements. The light of the sun, or any light, for that matter, was concentrated through the lens onto a series of photo-electric cells, composed of an alloy of selenium and the far more delicate element, illinium. A high tension current was there created, of such powerful intensity that it disintegrated the atoms of every element except osmium and indium into their constituent electrons. Consequently the interior as well as the long slit nozzle orifice at the other end, were made of these resistant metals.

Through a special process the tremendously powerful current was forced through the wide-angled nozzle in a spreading thin plate ray that sheared through earth and rock and metals as if they were butter.

Such was the machine we were after.

It was but the work of a few seconds to smash the delicate television and sono-boxes placed on the top of every machine. Now we were sure no warning could be given the master machine as it sat in its metallic cunning at the control board, ceaselessly receiving its messages from the area apparatus focussed above it.

Quietly, very quietly, we trundled the precious instrument along on its wheel base. The green lights dotted the sky above: the search-rays were firmly set on the rim.

At last, without any untoward alarm, we reached the welcome shelter of the base, but not, as I had expected, back to our tunnel. On the contrary, Keston, who had directed the party, had led us almost a quarter mile away. I looked up again, and understood.

The great overhang of the Glacier was directly above us!

Without a word, with hardly a sound, we trundled the disintegrator into a natural niche we found in the icy surface. It was almost completely hidden; only the funnel with its lens protruded into the open. The nozzle orifice was pointing directly at the interior of the ice pack.

"Now everything is set properly," Keston remarked with satisfaction as he straightened up from adjusting the various controls on the machine. "When the first ray of the morning sun strikes the lens, the disintegrator will start working. It will shear through a layer of ice over a radius of at least a mile. That huge crevasse, coupled with the terrific heat and the pressure from the mountain of ice above, will start the whole Glacier moving, or I'll be very much mistaken."

"Come, let us get back to our shelter before the alarm is given."

As he started to move, a dark bulk loomed ominously in front of us—Abud. His voice was harsh, forbidding.

"Do you mean to say nothing further is to be done here—that the disintegrator will work without any attention?"

"That is just what I said," Keston replied, somewhat surprised. "Step aside, Abud, and let us go. It is dangerous to remain here."

But Abud made no move to comply. Instead he thrust back his great shaggy head and gave vent to a resounding laugh.

"Ho-ho, my fine friends! So you were the brainy ones, eh? And Abud, the obedient dull-wit again? How nicely you've been fooled! I waited until you accommodately evolved the plan to reconquer the world, and put it into effect.

"Now that you've done so, I've no further need for you." The voice that heavily tried to be mocking, now snarled. "You poor fools, don't you know that with you out of the way, I, Abud, will be the Lord of the World. Those prolats up there know better than to disobey me."

"Do you mean you intend to kill us?" Keston asked incredulously.

"So you've actually grasped the idea!" was the sarcastic retort.

Meanwhile I was gradually edging to the side, my hand reaching for the bone knife in my bosom.

Abud saw my movement. "No, you don't!" he roared, and sprang for me, his long gleaming knife uplifted. I tugged desperately at my weapon, but it was entangled in the ragged furs. In a moment he was on top of me. Involuntarily I raised my arm to ward off the threatened blow, raging despair in my heart.

The point fell, but Keston struck at the savage arm with all his might, deflecting the blade just in time. It seared my shoulder like a red hot iron, and in the next instant all three of us were a rolling, kicking, snarling trio of animals. We fought desperately in the dark. There were no rules of the game. Biting, gouging, kicking—everything went.

Keston and I, weakened as we were from long starvation and the biting cold, were no match for our powerful, huge-muscled opponent, well clad and well nourished as he was. Though we fought with the strength of despair, a violent blow from his huge fist knocked Keston out of the fight. Hairy fingers grasped my throat. "I'll break your neck for you," he snarled, and his hands tightened. I struggled weakly, but I was helpless. I could just see his hateful face grinning at my contortions.

I was passing out—slowly, horribly. Keston was still motionless. Colored lights danced before my eyes, little spots that flared and died out in crashing blackness. Then the whole world leaped into a flaming white, so that my eyeballs hurt. In the dim recesses of my pain-swept mind I thought that strangulation must end like this. The brightness held dazzlingly.

But suddenly a fiercer pain swept into my consciousness—the pain of gasping breath forcing air through a tortured gullet into suffocating lungs.

I struggled up into the fierce illumination. From a sitting position I saw Abud, now clearly visible as in midday, craning his head way back. I looked, too—and, in spite of my stabbing gasps for air, jumped to my feet. The search-rays from the scout planes were focussed directly on us!

I knew what that meant. The sight of us was even then being cast upon the 2-RX visor-screen in the Central Control Station. The devilish master machine was even then manipulating the proper buttons. We had not a second to lose!

My strangled throat hurt horribly, but I managed a hoarse yell, "Run!" and I tottered to where Keston yet lay, bathed in the deadly illumination, unmoving.

There was a snarl of animal fear from Abud, and he started to run, wildly, with never a backward glance at us.

Even in my own fear, expecting each instant the crash of terminite about me, I managed to hurl a last word at the fleeing figure. "Coward!" That relieved my

feelings considerably.

I tottered over and tugged at Keston. He was limp. I looked up. Hundreds of planes were converging overhead; the night was a criss-cross of stabbing search-rays. I lifted my friend and slung him across my shoulder. Every exertion, every move, was accompanied by excruciating agony, but I persevered. Abud was already halfway to the tunnel, running like mad.

Then, what I had dreaded, happened. There came a swoosh through the night, a dull thud, a blinding flash and roar that paled the search-rays into insignificance. The first terminite bomb had been dropped!

For a moment the landscape was filled with flying rocks and huge chunks of ice. When the great clouds of violently upthrown earth had settled, there was no sign of Abud. He had been directly in the path of the explosion!

Staggering under my load, I headed as close to the

ice pack as I could. There was no safety out in the open. I groaned heavily past the disintegrator, whose very existence I had forgotten in the crash of events.

A sizzling hum, a thin eddy of steam, halted me in my tracks. I stared. The machine was working! Even as I watched, a great wedge was momentarily being driven further and further into the ice—a great fan-shaped wedge. Clouds of steam billowed out, growing thicker and heavier. A rushing stream of unleashed water was lapping at my feet.

I was bewildered, frankly so. What had started the disintegrator in the dead of night? "Of course!" I shouted exultantly to the limp body on my shoulder.

For a search-ray was fixed steadily on the funnel. There it was. From that blinding light the machine was getting the energy it needed. If only the visor did not disclose that little bit of metal to the unwinking master machine! I looked again and took heart. It was almost undistinguishable against the dazzling blur of ice in the fierce white light. If those rays held, the salvation of the world was assured!

There was only one way to do it. I shrank at my own thoughts, yet there was no alternative: it must be done. I was hidden from the rays under a projection of ice, terminate bombs were dropping methodically over a rapidly devastated sector with methodical regularity. Sooner or later the master machine would feel that we were exterminated, and the search-rays switched off. That would mean that the disintegrator would cease working, and the whole plan fall through. In the morning light, the sector signalling apparatus, at the first sign of renewed activity, would give warning, and the unhuman thing of metal at the controls would discover and wreck our last hope.

No, I must walk boldly into the bombed area and discover myself as alive in the visors of the planes and make them continue to bomb and throw their search-rays on the scarred plain. That meant the disintegrator would receive the vital light.

But how about Keston? I couldn't leave him there on the ground, motionless, while I deserted him. Nor could I take him with me. I was prepared to take my chances with almost certain death, but I could not

trifle with his life so. I was in an agony of indecision.

Just then the form on my aching shoulder stirred, sighed, struggled a bit, and suddenly slid down to a standing position. Keston swayed unsteadily a moment, straightened, looked about him in amazement.

"What's happening here?" he demanded.

"Why, you old war horse," I shouted in my relief, "I thought you were out of the picture completely!"

"Not me," he answered indignantly. "I'm all right. But you haven't answered my question."

A terminite bomb exploded not so far away from where we stood. I ducked involuntarily, Keston doing likewise.

"There's the answer," I grinned, "and a rather neat one, too. But I'll explain."

In a few words I sketched what had happened, and

showed him the disintegrator spreading its deadly waves of destruction. By now there was a torrent enveloping us up to our knees. We would have to move soon, or be drowned in the slowly rising water.

Then, hesitatingly, I told him of my scheme to keep the search-rays in action. His lean face sobered, but he nodded his head bravely. "Of course, that is the only way to keep them at it. You and I will start at once, in separate directions, so that if they get one, the other will continue to draw the search-rays down on the plain, and into the disintegrator."

"Not you, Keston," I dissented in alarm. "Your life is too valuable. Your brain and skill will be needed to remodel the world and make it habitable for the few prolats that are left, after the machines are wiped out."

"You're just as valuable a man as I am," he lied affectionately. "No, my mind is made up. We chance this together." And to all my pleadings he was obdurate, insisting that we each take an equal risk.

I gave in at last, with a little choke in my throat. We shook hands with a steady grip, and walked out into the glare of light, on divergent paths. Would I ever see my friend again?

There was a pause of seconds as I walked on and on; came then an earth-shattering crash that flung me to the ground. The visors had caught the picture of me! I picked myself up, bruised and sore, but otherwise unharmed. I started to run.

The sky was a blaze of zooming planes that hurled destruction on the land below. Far off could be heard the rumbling roar of hurrying machines—tractors, diggers, disintegrators, levelers, all the mighty mobile masses of metal that man's brain had conceived—all hurrying forward in massed attack to seek out and destroy their creators, obedient to the will of a master machine, immobile, pressing buttons in the Central Control System.

The night resolved itself into a weird phantasmagoric nightmare for me, a gigantic game of hide-and-seek, in which I was "it." Gasping, choking, flung to earth

and stunned by ear-shattering explosions, staggering up somehow, ducking to avoid being crushed beneath the ponderous treads of metal monsters that plunged uncannily for me, sobbing aloud in terror, swerving just in time from in front of a swinging crane, instinctively side-stepping just as a pale violet ray swept into nothingness all before it—I must have been delirious, for I retain only the vaguest memory of the horror.

And all the time the guiding search-rays biased down upon the torn and shattered fields, and the disintegrator, unnoticed in the vast uproar, steadily kept up its deadly work.

At last, in my delirium and terror, I heard a great rending and tearing. I looked up, and a tractor just missed me as it rolled by on swishing treads. But that one glance was enough. The ice cap was moving, flowing forward, a thousand-foot wall of ice! Great billowing clouds of steam spurted from innumerable cracks. The deed had been done! The world was saved for mankind!

Summoning the last ounce of strength, I set off on a steady run for the shelter of the rock cave, to be out of the way when the final smash-up came.

I was not pursued. The ponderous machines, thousands of them, were hastily forming into solid ranks directly in front of the tottering glacier wall. The master machine had seen its impending fate in the visors, and was organizing a defense.

Even in my elation, I could not but feel unwilling admiration for this monstrous thing of metal and quartz, imbued with an intelligence that could think more coolly and quickly than most humans.

Yet I did not stop running until I reached the cave. My heart gave a great bound. For there, peering anxiously with worn face into the growing dawn, stood the figure of Keston—my friend whom I had never expected to see alive again.

"Meron!" he shouted. "Is it you—or your ghost?"

"The very question I was about to ask you," I parried.

"But look, old friend: see what your genius has accomplished—and is now destroying."

The mountain of ice was flowing forward, gathering speed on the way. At an invisible signal, the massed machines—thousands on thousands of them—started into action. Like shock troops in a last desperate assault they ground forward, a serried line that exactly paralleled the threatened break, and hundreds deep. This old earth of ours had never witnessed so awe-inspiring a sight.

They smashed into that moving wall of ice with the force of uncounted millions of tons. We could hear the groaning and straining of furiously turning machinery as they heaved.

Keston and I looked at each other in amazement. The master machine was trying to hold back the mighty Glacier by the sheer power of its cohorts!

A wild light sprang into Keston's eye—of admiration, of regret. "What a thing is this that I created!" he muttered. "If only—" I truly believe that for a moment

he half desired to see his brain-child triumph.

The air was hideous with a thousand noises. The Glacier wall was cracking and splitting with the noise of thunderclaps; the machines were whirring and banging and crashing. It was a gallant effort!

But the towering ice wall was not to be denied. Forward, ever forward, it moved, pushing inexorably the struggling machines before it, piling them up high upon one another, grinding into powder the front ranks.

And to cap it all, the huge overhang, a thousand feet high, was swaying crazily and describing ever greater arcs.

"Look!" I screamed and flung up my arm. Great freight planes were flying wing-to-wing, head-on for the tottering crag—deliberately smashing into the topmost point.

"Trying to knock it back into equilibrium!" said Keston, eyes ablaze, dancing about insanely.

But the last suicidal push did not avail. With screams as of a thousand devils and deafening rending roars, the whole side of the Glacier seemed to lean over and fall in a great earth-shattering crescendo of noise.

While we watched, fascinated, rooted to the ground, that thousand feet of glittering wall described a tremendous arc, swinging with increasing momentum down, down, down to the earth it had so long been separated from.

The clamoring machines were buried under, lost in a swirl of ice and snow. Only the Central Station remained, a few moments defiant under the swift onrush of its unfeeling foe.

With a crash that could have been heard around the world, the uppermost crag struck the Station. The giant Glacier wall was down. The earth, the sky, the universe was filled with ice, broken, shattered, torn, splintered, vaporized!

The ground beneath our feet heaved and tumbled in violent quake. We were thrown heavily—and I knew

no more....

Sweltered out of unconsciousness. Keston was chafing my hands and rubbing my forehead with ice. He smiled wanly to find me still alive. Weak and battered, I struggled to my feet.

Before me was a wilderness of ice, a new mountain range of gigantic tumbled blocks of dazzling purity. Of the embattled machines, of the Central Control Station, there was not a sign. They were buried forever under hundreds of feet of frozen water.

I turned to Keston and shook his hand. "You've won; you've saved the world. Now let's get the prolats and start to rebuild."

There was no trace of exultation in Keston's voice. Instead, he unaccountably sighed as we trudged up a narrow winding path to the top. "Yes," he said half to himself, "I've done it. But...."

"But what?" I asked curiously.

"That beautiful, wonderful machine I created!" he burst forth in sudden passion. "To think that it should lie down there, destroyed, a twisted mass of scrap metal and broken glass!"

August 1931

97 The Danger from the Deep by Ralph Milne Farley

Marooned on the sea-floor, his hoisting cable cut, young Abbot is left at the mercy of the man-sharks.

Aproximate word count: 10,200

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

Within a thick-walled sphere of steel eight feet in diameter, with crystal-clear fused-quartz windows, there crouched an alert young scientist, George Abbot. The sphere rested on the primeval muck and slime at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean, one mile beneath the surface.

The beam from his 200-watt searchlight, which shot out through one of his three windows into the dark blue depths beyond, seemed faint indeed, yet it served to illuminate anything which crossed it, or on

which it fell.

For a considerable length of time since his descent to the ocean floor, young Abbot had clung to one of the thick windows of his bathysphere, absorbed by the marine life outside. Slender small fish with stereoscopic eyes, darted in and out of the beam of light. Swimming snails floated by, carrying their own phosphorescent lanterns. Paper-thin transparent crustaceans swam into view, followed by a few white shrimps, pale as ghosts. Then a mist of tiny fish swept across his field of vision. Abbot cupped his face in his hands, and stared out.

The incongruous thought flashed across his mind that thus he had often sat by the window of his club in New York, and gazed out at the passing motor traffic.

His searchlight cut a sharp swath through the blue muck. More than once he thought he saw large moving fish-like forms far away.

"Speed up the generator," he called into his phone.

Immediately the shaft of light brightened. He set about trying to focus upon one of those dim elusive shapes which had so intrigued him.

But suddenly the searchlight went out! Intent on repairing the apparatus as rapidly as possible, Abbot snapped the button-switch, which ought to have illuminated the interior of his diving-sphere; but the lights did not go on. Then he noticed that the electric fan, on which he depended to keep his air-supply properly mixed, had stopped.

He spoke into the telephone transmitter, which hung in front of his mouth: "Hi, there, up on the boat! My electric power is cut off. I'm down here with my fan stopped and my heat cut off. Hoist me up, and be quick about it!"

"O.K., sir."

As the young man waited for the winch to get under way on the boat a mile above him, he pulled out his

electric pocket flashlight and sent its feeble ray out through his quartz-glass window into the dim royal-purple depths beyond, in one last attempt to get a look at those mysterious fish-shapes which had so intrigued him.

And then he saw one of them distinctly.

Evidently they had swum closer when the glow of his searchlight had stopped; and so the sudden flash of his pocket-light had taken them by surprise.

For, as he snapped it on, he caught an instant's glimpse of a grinning fish-face pressed close against the outside of his thick window-pane, as though trying to peer in at him. The fish-face somewhat resembled the head of a shark, except that the mouth was a bit smaller and not quite so leeringly brutal, and the forehead was rather high and domed.

But what most attracted Abbot's attention, in the brief instant before the startled fish whisked away in a swirl of phosphorescent foam, was the fact that, from beneath each of the two pectoral fins, there protruded

what appeared to be a skinny human arm, terminating in three fingers and a thumb!



Then the fish was gone. Abbot snapped off his little light.

The diving-sphere quivered, as the hoisting-cable tautened. But suddenly the sphere settled back to the bottom of the sea with a jarring thud. "Cable's parted, sir!" spoke a frantic voice in his ear-phones.

For a moment George Abbot sat stunned with horror. Then his mind began to race, like a squirrel in a cage, seeking some way of escape.

Perhaps he could manage to unscrew the 400-pound trap door at the top of the sphere, and shoot to the surface, with the bubbling-out of the confined air. But his scientifically trained mind made some rapid calculations which showed him this was absurd.

At the depth of a mile, the pressure is roughly 156 atmospheres, that is to say, 156 times the air-pressure at the surface of the earth; and the moment that his sphere was opened to this pressure, he would be blown back inwardly away from the man-hole, and the air inside his sphere would suddenly be compressed to only $1/156$ of its former volume.

Not only would this pressure be sufficient to squash him into a mangled pulp, but also the sudden compression of the air inside the sphere would generate enough heat to fry that mangled pulp to a crisp cinder almost instantly.

As George Abbot came to a full realization of the horror of these facts, he recoiled from the trap-door as though it were charged with death.

"For Heaven's sakes, do something!" he shrieked in agony into the transmitter.

"Courage, sir," came back the reply. "We are rigging up a grapple just as fast as we can. Long before your oxygen gives out, we shall slide it down to you along the telephone line, which is the only remaining connection between us. When it settles about your sphere, and you can see its hooks outside your window by the light of your pocket-flash, let us know, and we'll trip the grapple and haul you up."

"Thank you," replied the young man.

He was calm now, but it was an enforced and numb kind of calmness. Mechanically he throttled down his oxygen supply, so as to make it last longer.

Mechanically he took out his notebook and pencil and started to write down, in the dark, his experiences; for he was determined to leave a full account for

posterity, even though he himself should perish.

After setting down a categorical description of the successive partings of the electric light cable and the hoist cable, and his thoughts and feelings in that connection, he described in detail the shark with hands, which he had seen through the window of his sphere. He tried to be very explicit about this, for he realized that his account would probably be laid, by everyone, to the disordered imagination of his last dying moments; being a true scientist, George Abbot wanted the world to believe him, so that another sphere would be built and sent down to the ocean depths, to find out more about these peculiar denizens of the deep.

Of course, no one would believe him. This thought kept drumming in his ears. No one—except Professor Osborne. Old Osborne would believe!

George Abbot's mind flashed back to a conversation he had had with the old professor, just before the oil interests had sent him on this exploring trip to discover the source of the large quantities of

petroleum which had begun to bubble up from the bottom of a certain section of the Pacific very near where Abbot now was.

Osborne had said, "This petroleum suggests a gusher to me. And what causes gushers? Human beings, boring for oil, to satisfy human needs."

"But, Professor," Abbot had objected, "there can't be any human beings at the bottom of the sea!"

"Why not?" Professor Osborne had countered. "Life is supposed to have originated spontaneously in the slime of the ocean depths; therefore that part of the earth has had a head-start on us in the game of evolution. May not this head-start have been maintained right down to date, thus producing at the bottom of the sea a race superior to anything upon the dry land?"

"But," Abbot had objected further, "if so, why haven't they come up to visit or conquer us? And why haven't we ever found any trace of them?"

"Quite simple to explain," the old professor had replied. "Any creature who can live at the frightful pressures of the ocean depths could never survive a journey even halfway to the surface. It would be like our trying to live in an almost perfect vacuum. We should explode, and so would these denizens of the deep, if they tried to come up here. Even one of their dead bodies could not be brought to the surface in recognizable form. No contact with them will ever be possible, nor will they ever constitute a menace to any one—for which we may thank the Lord!"

George Abbot now reviewed this conversation as he crouched in his diving-sphere in the purple darkness of the marine depths. Yes, old Osborne would believe him. The diary must be written for Osborne's eyes.

Abbot sent another beam from his pocket light suddenly out into the water; and this time he surprised several of the peculiar fish. These, like the first, had arms and hands and high intelligent foreheads.

Then suddenly Abbot laughed a harsh laugh. Old

Osborne had been wrong in one thing, namely in saying that the super-race of the deep would never be a menace to anyone. They were being a menace to George Abbot, right now, for it was undoubtedly they who had cut his cables. Probably they were possessed of much the same scientific curiosity with regard to him as he was with regard to them, and so they had determined to secure him as a museum specimen.

The idea was a weird one. He laughed again, mirthlessly.

"What is the matter, sir?" came an anxious voice in his ear-phones.

"Hurry that grapple!" was his reply. "I have found out what cut my cables. There are some very intelligent-looking fish down here, and I think they want me for —"

An ominous click sounded in his ears. Then silence.

"Hello! Hello there!" he shouted. "Can you hear me up on the boat?"

But no answer came back. The line remained dead. The strange fish had cut George Abbot's last contact with the upper world. The grapple-hooks could never find him now, for there was now not even a telephone cable to guide them down to his sphere.

The realization that he was hopelessly lost, and that he had not much longer to live, came as a real relief to him, after the last few moments of frantic uncertainty.

Hoping that his sphere would eventually be found, even though too late to do him any good, he set assiduously to work jotting down all the details which he could remember of those strange denizens of the deep, the man-handed sharks, which he was now firmly convinced were the cause of his present predicament.

He stared out through one of his windows into the brilliant blue darkness, but did not turn on his flashlight. How near were these enemies of his, he wondered?

The presence of those menacing man-sharks, just outside the four-inch-thick steel shell, which withstood a ton of pressure for each square inch of its surface, began to obsess young Abbot. What were they doing out there in the watery-blue midnight? Perhaps, having secured his sphere as a scientific specimen, they were already preparing to cut into it so as to see what was inside. That these fish could cut through four inches of steel was not so improbable as it sounded, for had they not already succeeded in severing a rubber cable an inch and a half thick, containing two heavy copper wires, and also two inches of the finest, non-kinking steel rope!

The young scientist flashed his pocket torch out through the thick quartz pane, but his enemies were nowhere in sight. Then he fell to calculating his oxygen supply. His normal consumption was about half a quart per minute, at which rate his two tanks would be good for thirty-six hours. His chemical racks contained enough soda-lime to absorb the excess carbon dioxide, enough calcium chloride to keep down the humidity and enough charcoal to sweeten

the body odors for much more than that period.

For a moment, the thought of these facts encouraged him. He had been down less than two hours. Perhaps the boat above him could affect his rescue in the more than thirty-four hours which remained!

But then he realized that he had failed to take into consideration the near-freezing temperature of the ocean depths. This temperature he knew to be in the neighborhood of 39 degrees Fahrenheit—even though no thermometer hung outside his window, as none could withstand the frightful pressures at the bottom of the sea. For it is one of the remarkable facts of inductive science that man has been able to figure out a priori that the temperature at all deep points of the ocean, tropic as well as arctic, must always be stable at approximately 39 degrees.

Abbot was clad only in a light cotton sailor suit, and now that his source of heat had been cut off by the severing of his power lines, his prison was rapidly becoming unbearably chilly. His thick steel sphere constituted such a perfect transmitter of heat that he

might almost as well have been actually swimming in water of 39 degrees temperature, so far as comfort was concerned.

Abbot's emotions ran all the gamut from stupefaction, through dull calmness, clear-headed thought, intense but aimless mental activity, nervousness, frenzy, and insane delirium, back to stupefaction again.

During one of his periods of calmness, he figured out what an almost total impossibility there was of the chance that his ship, one mile above him on the surface, could ever find his sphere with grappling hooks. Yet he prayed for that chance. A single chance in a million sometimes does happen.

Several hours had by now elapsed since the parting of the young scientist's cables. It was bitterly cold inside the sphere. In order to keep warm, he had to exercise during his calm moments as systematically as his cramped quarters would permit. During his frantic moments he got plenty of exercise automatically. And of course all this movement used up more than the normal amount of oxygen, so that he was forced to

open the valves on his tanks to two or three times their normal flow. His span of further life was thereby cut to ten or twelve hours, if indeed he could keep himself warm for that long.

Why didn't the people on the boat do something!

He was just about to indulge in one of his frantic fits of despair, when he heard or felt—the two senses being strangely commingled in his present situation—a clank or thump upon the top of his bathysphere. Instantly hope flooded him. Could it be that the one chance in a million had actually happened, and that a grapple from the boat above had actually found him?

With feverish expectation, he pressed the button of his little electric pocket flashlight, and sent its feeble beam out through one of the quartz-glass windows into the blue-black depths beyond.

No hooks in front of this window. He tried the others. No hooks there, either. But he did see plenty of the superhuman fish. Eighteen of them, he counted, in sight at one time. And also two huge snake-like

creatures with crested backs and maned heads, veritable sea-serpents.

As there was nothing the young man could do to assist in the grappling of his sphere by his friends in the boat above, he devoted his time to jotting down a detailed description of these two new beasts and of their behavior.

One of the sharks appeared to be leading or driving them up to the bathysphere; and when they got close enough, Abbot was surprised to see that they wore what appeared to be a harness!

The clanking upon the bathysphere continued, and now the young man learned its cause. It was not the grapple hooks from his ship, but chains—chains which the man-armed sharks were wrapping around the bathysphere.

Two more of the harnessed sea-serpents swam into view, and these two were hitched to a flat cart: an actual cart with wheels. The chains were attached to the harness of the original two beasts; they swam

upward and disappeared from view; and the sphere slowly rose from the mucky bottom of the sea, to be lowered again squarely on top of the cart. The cart jerked forward, and a journey over the ocean floor began.

Then the little pocket torch dimmed to a dull red glow, and the scene outside faded gradually from view. Abbot switched off the now useless light and set to work with scientific precision to record all these unbelievable events.

In his interest and excitement, he had forgotten the ever-increasing cold; but gradually, as he wrote, the frigidity of his surroundings was forced on his consciousness. He turned on more oxygen, and exercised frantically. Meanwhile the cart, carrying his bathysphere, bumped along over an uneven road.

From time to time, he tried his almost exhausted little light, but its dim red beam was completely absorbed by the blue of the ocean depths, and he could make out nothing except two bulking indistinct shapes, writhing on ahead of him. Finally even this degree of

visibility failed, and he could see absolutely nothing outside.

He was now so chilled and numb that he could no longer write. With a last effort, he noted down that fact, and then put the book away in its rack.

He began to feel drowsy. Rousing himself, he turned on more oxygen. The effect was exhilaration and a feeling of silly joy. He began to babble drunkenly to himself. His head swam. His mind was in a daze.

It seemed hours later when he awoke. Ahead of him in the distance there was a dim pale-blue light, against which there could be seen, in silhouette, the forms of the two serpentine steeds and their fish-like drivers. Abbot's hands and feet were completely numb, but his head was clear.

As they drew nearer to the light, it gradually took form, until it turned out to be the mouth of a cave. The cart entered it.

Down a long tunnel they progressed, the light getting

brighter and brighter as they advanced. The color of the light became a golden green. The rough stone walls of the tunnel could now be seen; and finally there appeared, ahead, two semicircular doors, swung back against the sides of the passage.

Beyond these doors, the tunnel walls were smooth and exactly cylindrical, and on the ceiling there were many luminous tubes, which lit up the place as brightly as daylight. The cart came to a stop.

The young scientist could now see with surprising distinctness his captors and their serpentine steeds, and even the details of the chains and the harness. He tried to pick up his diary, so as to jot down some points which he had theretofore missed; but his hands were too numb. But at least he could keep on observing; so he glued his eyes to the thick quartz window-pane once more.

A short distance ahead in the passage there was another pair of doors. Presently these swung open and the cavalcade moved forward. Five or six successive pairs of doors were passed in this manner,

and then the sea-serpents began to thrash about and become almost unmanageable. It was evident that some change not to their liking had taken place in their surroundings.

At last, as one of the portals swung open, young Abbot saw what appeared to be four deep-sea diving-suits. Could these suits contain human beings? And if so, who? It seemed incredible, for no diving-suit had ever been devised in which a man could descend to the depth of one mile, and live.

These four figures, whatever they were, came stolidly forward and took charge of the cart. One of the sharks swam up to them and appeared to talk to them with its hands. Then the sharks unhitched the two sea-serpents and led them to the rear, and Abbot saw them no more.

The four divers picked up the chains, and slowly towed the cart forward, their clumsy, ponderous movements contrasting markedly with the swift and sure swishings which had characterized the man-sharks and their snake-like steeds.

Several more pairs of doors were passed, and then there met them four figures in less cumbersome diving-suits, like those ordinarily used by men just below the surface of the sea. One of the deep-sea divers then pressed his face close to the outside of one of the windows of the bathysphere, as though to take a look inside; but the four newcomers waved him away, and hurriedly picked up the chains.

Nevertheless, in that brief instant, Abbot had seen within the head-piece of the diver what appeared to be a bearded human face.

Several more pairs of doors were passed. The four deep-sea divers floundered along beside the cart, quite evidently having more and more difficulty of locomotion as each successive doorway was passed, until finally they lay down and were left behind.

At last the procession entered a section of tunnel which was square, instead of circular, and in which there was a wide shelf along one side about three feet above the floor. The four divers then dropped the chains, and one by one took a look at Abbot through his window.

And he at the same time took a most interested look at them.

They had unmistakable human faces!

He must be dreaming! For even if Osborne was right about his supposed super-race at the bottom of the sea, this race could not be human, for the pressures here would be entirely too great. No human being could possibly stand two thousand pounds per square inch!

Having satisfied their curiosity, the four divers pulled themselves up onto the shelf, and sat there in a row with their legs hanging over.

Abbot glanced upward at the ceiling lights, but these had become strangely blurred. There seemed to be an opaque barrier above him, and this barrier seemed to be slowly descending. The lights blurred out completely, and were replaced by a diffused illumination over the entire ripply barrier. And then it dawned on the young man that this descending sheet of silver was the surface of the water. He was in a

lock, and the water was being pumped out.

The surface settled about the helmets of the divers, and their helmets disappeared; then their shoulders and the rest of them. At last it reached the level of Abbot's window. The divers could again be seen, and among them on the shelf there stood a half dozen naked bearded men, clad only in loin-cloths. They had evidently entered the lock while the water was subsiding.

These men unbuckled the helmets of the divers and helped them out, and then splashed down into the water and peered in through the windows of the bathysphere. Presently some of them left through a door at the end of the platform, but soon reappeared with staging, which they set up around the sphere. Then, climbing on top, they got to work on the man-hole cover.

As George Abbot realized their purpose, he became frantic. Although these men appeared to be human, just like himself, yet his scientifically-trained mind told him that they must be of some very special

anatomical structure, in order to be able to withstand the immense pressures at the bottom of the Pacific. It was all right for them to be out there, but it would be fatal to him!

And then the heavy circular door above him began slowly to revolve.

This was terrible! In a moment the crushing pressures of the depths would come seeping in. Rising unsteadily upon his knees, the young man tried with his fingers to resist the rotation of the door; but it continued to turn.

Yet no pressure could be felt. The door became completely unscrewed. It was pried up, and slid off the top of the bathysphere, to crash upon the floor outside. Inquisitive bearded faces peered down through the hole.

Young Abbot slumped to the cold bottom of the sphere and stared back at them. He was saved; incredibly saved! These were real people, the air was real air and he must therefore be on the surface of the earth,

instead of at the bottom of the Pacific as he had imagined! With a sigh of relief, he fainted....

When he came to his senses again, he was lying in a bed in a small room. Bending over him was the sweetest feminine face that he had ever seen.

The girl seemed to be about twenty years of age. She was clad in a clinging robe of some filmy green substance. Her hair was honey-brown, short and curly, and her forehead high and intelligent. Her eyes, an indescribable shade of deep violet, were matchlessly set off by her ivory skin.

The young man smiled up at her, and she smiled back. Thus far it had not occurred to him to wonder where he was, or why. No recollection of his recent strange adventures came to him. To him this was an exotic dream, from which he did not care to awake.

She spoke. Her words were unintelligible, and unlike any language which George Abbot knew or had even heard; and he was an accomplished linguist in addition to his other attainments.

And her words were not all that was strange about her speech, for the very tones of her voice sounded completely unhuman, although not displeasing. Her talk had a metallic ring to it, like the brassy blare of temple gongs, and yet was so smooth and subdued as to be sweeter than any sound that the young scientist had ever heard before.

"Beautiful dream fairy," replied the enraptured young man, "I haven't the slightest idea what you are saying, but keep right on. I like it."

His own voice sounded crass and crude compared to hers. At his first words she gave a start of surprise, but thereafter the sound did not appear to grate on her ears.

Then one of the bearded men in loin-cloths entered, and he and the girl talked together, quite evidently about their patient. The man's voice had the same strange metallic quality to it as that of the girl, but was deeper, so that it boomed with the rich notes of a bell.

At the sight of the man, young Abbot's memory swept back, and he remembered the adventure of his diving-sphere, and its capture, one mile down, by the strange shark-fish with human hands and arms. But how he had reached the surface of the earth again, he couldn't figure out. Nor did he particularly care.

The strange man withdrew, and the girl sat down beside the bed and smiled at Abbot. He smiled back at her.

Presently another girl entered and called, "Milli!"

The girl beside the bed started, and looking up asked some question, to which the other replied.

The newcomer brought in some strange warm food in a covered dish and then withdrew. The first girl proceeded to feed her patient.

After the meal, which tasted unlike anything which the young man had ever eaten before, the beautiful nurse again essayed conversation with him. She seemed perplexed and a bit frightened that he could

not understand her words. Somehow, the young man sensed that this girl had never heard any other language than her own, and that she did not even know that other languages existed.

Strengthened by his food, he determined to set about learning her language as soon as possible. So he pointed at her and asked, "Milli?"

She nodded, and spoke some word which he took for "yes."

Then he pointed to himself and said, "George."

She understood, but the word was a difficult one for her to duplicate in the metallic tongue of her people. She made several attempts, until he laughingly spoke her word for "yes."

Then he pointed to other objects about the room. She gave him the names of these, but he could easily see that she felt that, if he did not know the names for all these common things, there must be something the matter with him.

He wondered how he could make her understand that there were other languages in the world than her own; and then he remembered the sharks with their hands and what he had taken to be their sign language. Perhaps Milli at least knew of the existence of the sign language. This would afford a parallel; for if she realized that there were two languages in the world, might there not be three?

So Abbot made some meaningless signs with his fingers. Milli quite evidently was accustomed to this kind of talk, but she was further perplexed to find that George talked gibberish with his hands as well as with his mouth.

She made some signs with her hands, and then said something orally. Young Abbot instantly pointed to her mouth, and held up one finger; then to her hands, and held up two; then to his own mouth, and held up three, at the same time speaking a sentence of English. Instantly she caught on: there were three languages in the world. And thereafter she no longer regarded him as crazy.

For several hours she taught him. Then another meal was brought, after which she left him, and the lights went out.

He awakened feeling thoroughly rested and well. The lights were on and Milli was beside him.

He asked for his clothes. They were brought. Milli withdrew and he put them on.

After breakfast, which they ate together, one of the bearded men came and led him out through a number of winding corridors into a larger room, in which there was a closed spherical glass tank, about ten feet in diameter, containing one of the human sharks. Around the tank stood five of the bearded men.

One of them proceeded to address Abbot, but of course the young American could not make out what he was saying. This apparent lack of intelligence seemed to exasperate the man; and finally he turned toward the tank, and engaged in a sign language conference with the fish; then turned back to Abbot again and spoke to him very sternly.

But Abbot shook his head and replied, "Milli. Bring Milli."

One of the other men flashed a look of triumph at their leader, and laughed.

"Yes," he added, "bring Milli."

The leader scowled at him, and some words were interchanged, but it ended in Milli being sent for. She apparently explained the situation to the satisfaction of the fish, to the intense glee of the man who had sent for her, and to the rather complete discomfiture of the leader of the five.

Abbot later learned that the leader's name was Thig, and that the name of the gleeful man was Dolf.

The reception over, Milli led Abbot back to his room.

There ensued many days—very pleasant days—of language instruction from Milli. Dolf and Thig and others of the five came frequently, to note his progress and to talk with him and ask him questions.

A sitting room was provided for him, adjoining his sleeping quarters. Milli occupied quarters nearby.

Within a week he had mastered enough of the language of these people, for their strange history began to be intelligible to him.

In spite of the fact that the air here was at merely atmospheric pressure, nevertheless this place was one mile beneath the surface of the Pacific. Milli and her people lived in a city hollowed out of a reef of rocks, reinforced against the terrific weight of the water and filled with laboratory-made air. They had never been to the surface of the sea.

The fish with the human arms were their creators and their masters.

Professor Osborne had been right. The fish of the deep, having a head start on the rest of the world, had evolved to a perfectly unbelievable degree of intelligence. Centuries ago they had built for themselves the exact analog of George Abbot's bathysphere, and in it they had made much the same

sort of exploring trips to the surface that he had made down into the deeps. But their spheres had been constructed to keep in, rather than to keep out, great pressure.

Their scientists had gathered a wealth of data as to conditions on the surface, and had even seen and studied human beings. But their insatiable scientific curiosity had led them to want to know more about the strange country above them and the strange persons who inhabited it. And so they set about breeding, in their own laboratories, creatures which should be as like as possible to those whom they had observed on the surface.

Of course, this experiment necessitated their first setting up an air-filled partial vacuum similar to that which surrounds the earth. But they had persisted. They had brought down samples of air from the surface of the sea, and had analyzed and duplicated it on a large scale.

Finally, through long years, they had so directed—and controlled the course of evolution, in their breeder-

as first to be able to produce creatures which could live in air at low pressures, and then to evolve the descendants of those creatures into intelligent human beings.

Some of the lower types of this evolutionary process, both in the direct line of descent of man, and among the collateral offshoots, had been retained for food and other purposes. Abbot, with intense scientific interest, studied these specimens in the zoo of the underwater city where he was staying.

Plans had been in progress for some time, among the fish-folk and their human subjects, to send an expedition to the surface. And now the shark masters had fortunately been able to secure alive an actual specimen of the surface folk—namely, George Abbot. The expedition was accordingly postponed until they could pump out of the young scientist all the information possible.

Abbot was naturally overjoyed at the prospect. This would not only get him out of here—but think what it would mean to science!

The plans of the sharks were entirely peaceful. Furthermore there were only about two hundred of their laboratory-bred synthetic human beings, and so these could constitute no menace to mankind. Accordingly he enthusiastically assured them that they could depend upon the hearty cooperation of the scientists of the outer earth.

During all his stay so far in this cave city, Abbot had been permitted to come in contact only with Milli, the members of the Committee of Five, and an occasional guard or laboratory assistant. Yet, in spite of the absence of personal contacts with other members of this strange race, Abbot was constantly aware of a background of many people and tense activity, which kept the wheels of industry and domestic economy turning in this undersea city.

Although the young man readily accustomed himself to the speech and food and customs of this strange race, his personal modesty and neatness revolted at the loin-cloths and beards of the men; and so, by special dispensation, he was permitted to wear his sailor suit and to shave.

The Committee of Five, who constituted a sort of ruling body for the city, interviewed him at length, cross-examined him most skilfully and took copious notes. But there seemed to be a strange lack of common meeting ground between their minds and his, so that very often they were forced to call on Milli to act as an intermediary. The beautiful young girl seemed able to understand both George Abbot and the leaders of her own people with equal facility.

A number of specially constructed submarines had already been built to carry the expedition to the surface. Before it came time to use them, Abbot tried to paint as glowing a picture as possible of life on earth; but he found it necessary to gloss over a great many things. How could he explain and justify war, liquor, crime, poverty, graft, and the other evils to which constant acquaintance has rendered the human race so calloused?

He was unable to deceive the men of the deep. With their super-intelligence, they relentlessly unearthed from him all the salient facts. And, as a result of their discoveries, their initial friendly feeling for the world

of men rapidly developed into supreme contempt.

But Abbot on the other hand developed a deep respect for them. Their chemistry and their electrical and mechanical devices amazed and astounded him. They even were able to keep sun-time and tell the seasons, by means of gyroscopes!

Age was measured much as it is on the surface. This fact was brought to Abbot's attention by the approach of Milli's twentieth birthday.

Strange to relate, she seemed to dread the approach of that anniversary, and finally told Abbot the reason.

"It is the custom," said she, "when a girl or a boy reaches twenty, to give a very rigorous intelligence test. In fact, such a test is given on every birthday, but the one on the twentieth is the hardest. So far, I have just barely passed each test, which fact marks me as of very low mentality indeed. And, if I fail this time, they will kill me, so as to make room for others who have a better right to live."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the young man indignantly. "Why, you have a better mind than those of many of the leading scientists of the outer world!"

"All the same," she gloomily replied, "it is way below standard for down here."

On the day of the test, he did his best to cheer her up. Dolf also came—she seemed to be an especial protege of his—and gave her his encouragement. He had been coaching her heavily for the examinations for some time previous.

But later in the day she returned in tears to report to Abbot that she had failed, and had only twenty-four hours to live. Before he realized what he was doing, Abbot had seized her in his arms, and was pouring out to her a love which up to that moment he had not realized existed.

Finally her sobbing ceased, and she smiled through her tears.

"George, dear," said she, "it is worth dying, to know

that you care for me like this."

"I won't let them kill you!" asserted the young man belligerently. "They owe me something for the assistance which I am to give them on their expedition. I shall demand your life as the price of my cooperation. Besides, you are the only one of all your people who has brains enough to understand what I tell them about the outer earth. It is they who are weak-minded; not you!"

But she sadly shook her head.

"It would never do for you to sponsor me," said she, "for it would alienate my one friend in power, Dolf. He loves me; no, don't scowl, for I do not love him. But, for the safety of both of us, we must not let him know of our love—yet."

"'Yet'?" exclaimed Abbot, "when you have less than a day to live?"

"You have given me hope," the girl replied, "and also an idea. Dolf promised to appeal to the other

members of the Five. I have just thought of a good ground for his appeal; namely, my ability to translate your clumsy description into a form suited to the high intelligence of our superiors."

"'Clumsy'?" exclaimed the young man, a bit nettled.

"Oh, pardon me, dear. I'm so sorry," said she contritely. "I didn't mean to let it slip. And now I must rush to Dolf and tell him my idea."

"Don't let him make love to you, though!" admonished Abbot gloomily.

She kissed him lightly, and fled.

A half hour later she was back, all smiles. The idea had gone across big. Dolf, as the leader of the projected expedition, had demanded that Milli be brought along as liaison officer between them and their guide; and the other four committeemen had reluctantly acceded. The execution was accordingly indefinitely postponed.

The young couple spent the evening making happy plans for their life together on the outer earth, for as soon as they should arrive in America, Dolf would have no further hold over them.

The next day, the Committee of Five announced that, for a change, they were going to give George Abbot an intelligence test. He had represented himself as being one of the scientists of the outer earth; accordingly, they could gauge the caliber of his fellow countrymen by determining his I. Q.

Milli was quite agitated when this program was announced, but the ordeal held no terrors for George Abbot. Had he not taken many such tests on earth and passed them easily?

So he appeared before the Committee of Five with a rather cocky air. He had yet to see an intelligence test too tricky for him to eat alive.

"Start him with something easy," suggested Dolf.

"Perhaps they don't have tests on the outer earth. You know, one gains a certain facility by practice."

"Milli didn't, in spite of all the practicing which you gave her," maliciously remarked Thig.

Dolf glowered at him.

"What is the cube root of 378?" suddenly asked one of the other members of the committee.

"Oh, a little over seven," hazarded Abbot.

"Come, come," boomed Thig: "give it to us exactly."

"Well, seven-point-two, I guess."

"Don't guess. Give it exact, to four decimal places."

"In my head?" asked Abbot incredulously.

"Certainly!" replied Thig. "Even a child could do that. We're giving you easy questions to start with."

"Start him on square root," suggested Dolf kindly.

"Remember he isn't used to these tests like our people are."

So they tried him with square root, in which he turned out to be equally dumb.

Abstract questions of physics and chemistry he did better on; but the actual quantitative problems, which they expected him to solve in his head, stumped him completely.

Then they asked him about education on earth, and the qualifications for becoming a scientist, and who were the leaders in his field, and what degrees they held, and what one had to do to get those degrees, etc. Finally they dismissed him. Dolf then sent for Milli.

She was gone about an hour, and returned to Abbot wide-eyed and incredulous.

"Oh, George," said she, lowering her voice. "Dolf tells me that your intelligence is below that of a five-year-old child! Perhaps that is why you and I get along so well together: we are both morons."

He started to protest, but she silenced him with a

gesture and hurried on. "I am not supposed to tell you this, but I want you to know that your examination today has resulted in a complete change in their plans for the expedition to the surface. They have consulted with the leaders of our masters, and they agree with them."

She was plainly agitated.

"What is it, dear?" asked Abbot, with ominous foreboding.

Milli continued: "Early during your test, when you demonstrated that you couldn't do the very simplest mathematical problems in your head, they began to doubt your boastings that you are a scientist. But you were so ingenuous in your answers about conditions on the surface, that finally their faith in your honesty returned. If you are a scientist among men, as they now believe, then the average run of your people must be mere animals. This explains what has puzzled them before; namely, how the people of the earth tolerate poverty and unemployment and crime, and disease and war."

"Well?"

"And so a mere handful of our people, by purely peaceful means, could easily make themselves the rulers of the earth. Probably this would be all for the best; but somehow, my feelings tell me that it is not. I know only too well what it is to be an inferior among intelligent beings; so will not your people be happier, left alone to their stupidity, just as I would be?"

George Abbot was crushed. This frank acceptance by Milli of the alleged fact that he was a mere moron, was most humiliating. And swiftly he realized what a real menace to the earth, was this contemplated invasion from the deeps.

All that was worst in the world above would taint these intellectual giants of the undersea. They would rise to supremacy, and then would become rapacious tyrants over those whom they would regard as being no more than animals.

He had witnessed jealousies among them down below. Might not these jealousies flame into huge wars when

translated to the world above? Giants striving for mastery, using the human cattle as cannon fodder! He painted to the girl a word-picture of the horrible vision which he foresaw.

The invasion must be stopped at all costs! He and Milli must pit their puny wits against these supermen!

But what could they do? As they were pondering this problem, a girl entered their sitting room—the same who had brought Abbot's breakfast on his first day in the caves. Milli introduced George to the newcomer, whose name was Romehl.

Romehl appeared so woebegone that the young American ventured to inquire if she too had been having difficulty with one of her tests. But that was not the trouble; hers was rather of the heart.

About the same age as Milli, Romehl had recently passed her twentieth birthday test and hence was eligible to marry; so she and a young man named Hakin had requested the fish-masters to give them the requisite permission. But their overlords for some

reason had peremptorily denied the request. Romehl and Hakin were desolate.

Young Abbot's sympathies were at once aroused.

"Can't something be done?" he started to ask.

But Milli silenced him with a warning glance. "Of course not!" she said. "Who are we to question the judgment of our all-knowing masters?"

Romehl had really come to Milli just to pour her troubles into a friendly ear, rather than because she hoped to get any helpful ideas. So she had a good cry, and finally left, somewhat comforted.

George and Milli then took up again the problem of saving the outer earth from the threatened invasion. Milli suggested that they go peaceably with the expedition, and then warn the authorities of America at the first opportunity after their arrival; but Abbot pointed out that this would merely result in their both being shut up in some insane asylum, as no one would believe such a crazy story as theirs.

The time for lights to be put out arrived without their thinking of any better idea.

Next day Milli spent considerable time with Dolf, and on her return excitedly informed Abbot that he had evolved a most diabolical plot. There were sufficient quantities of explosives in storage to blast a hole through the wall of the caves, letting in the sea and killing everyone in the city. Dolf planned to set this off with a time fuse, upon the departure of the expedition. Thus Thig and the people who were left behind—about two-thirds of the total population of the city—would be destroyed, and the fish would have no one to send after Dolf and his followers to dictate to them on the upper earth.

Relieved of the thralldom of the fish, Dolf could make himself Emperor of the World, and rule over the human cattle, with Milli at his side as Empress. An alluring program—from Dolf's point of view.

I didn't expect such treason even from Dolf!" exclaimed the young American. "We must tell Thig!"

"What good would that do?" remonstrated the girl. "If you failed to convince Thig, Dolf would make an end of us both. And if you convinced Thig, it would mean the end of Dolf, whose influence is all that keeps me alive. We must think of something else."

"Right, as always," replied Abbot.

A growl came from the doorway. It was Dolf, his bearded face black with wrath.

"So?" he sputtered. "Treachery, eh?"

He whistled twice and two guards appeared.

"Take them to the prison!" he raged, indicating Abbot and Milli. "Our expedition will have to do without a guide. I have learned enough of the American language to make a good start, and I guess I can pick up another guide when we reach the surface." Then, bending close to the frightened girl, he whispered, "And another Empress."

The guards hustled them away and locked them up.

As an added precaution, a sentinel was posted in front of each cell door.

Abbot immediately got busy.

"Can you get word for me at once to Thig?" he whispered to the man on guard.

"Perhaps," replied that individual non-committally.

"Then tell him," said Abbot, "that I have proof that Dolf is planning to destroy this city behind him, and never return from the surface."

The sentry became immediately agitated.

"So you know this?" he exclaimed. "How did it leak out? But—through Milli, of course. And the guard on her cell is not a member of the expedition! Curses! I must get word to Dolf, and have that guard changed at once."

And he darted swiftly away.

The young prisoner was plunged into gloom. Now he'd gone and done it! Why hadn't he first made appropriate inquiries of his guard?

A new guard appeared in front of the door.

"Are you going on the expedition?" asked Abbot.

"Yes, worse luck," replied the guard.

The prisoner forgot his own gloom, in his surprise at the gloominess of the other.

"Don't you want to go?" he exclaimed incredulously.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Do you know Romehl?" asked the guard.

"Yes," Abbot replied.

"Well, that's why."

"Then you must be Hakin!" exclaimed Abbot, with sudden understanding.

"Yes," replied the other dully.

"You are going on the expedition, and Romehl is not?"

"Quite correct."

"Say, look here!" exclaimed Abbot, and then he launched into the description of a plan, which just that moment had occurred to him, for him, Milli, Romehl and Hakin to make their getaway ahead of the expedition—in fact, that very night—and to set off the time-fuse before leaving.

It turned out that Hakin knew where the explosives were planted, and where the submarines were kept, and even how to operate them. He eagerly accepted the plan; and when next relieved as sentinel, he hurried away to inform Romehl.

Three hours later he was back on post. Quickly he explained to his prisoner all about the workings of the

submarines of the expedition. The lights-out bell rang, and all the city became dark, except for dim lights in the passageways. Hakin at once unlocked the door of Abbot's cell, and together the two young men sneaked down the corridor to the cell where Milli was confined.

Silently Hakin and Abbot sprang upon the guard and throttled him; then released Milli. There was no time for more than a few hurried words of explanation before the three of them left the prison and made for the locks of the subterranean canal, picking up Romehl at a preappointed spot on the way.

The canal locks were unguarded, as well as the storerooms of the submarines. Each of the rooms held two subs, and could open onto the second lock and be separately flooded.

The submarines were of steel as thick as Abbot's bathysphere. Their shape was that of an elongated rain drop, with fins. In the pointed tip of their tails were motors which could operate at any pressure. At the front end were quartz windows. In the top fin was

an expanding device which could be filled with buoyant gas, produced by chemicals, when the craft neared the surface. Each submarine also contained a radio set, so tuned as to be capable of opening and closing the radio-controlled gates of the locks. Each would carry comfortably two or three persons.

Having picked out two submarines and found them to be in order, Hakin sneaked back into the corridor to set off the time-fuse, leaving his three companions in the dark in the storeroom. Abbot put a protecting arm around Milli, while Romehl snuggled close to her other side.

Their hearts were all racing madly with excitement, and this was intensified when they heard Hakin talking with someone just outside their door.

Then Hakin returned unexpectedly.

"Something terrible has happened!" he breathed.

"The explosives have been discovered and are gone.

One of the expedition men has just informed me.

Someone must have gotten word to Thig—"

"Why, I did," interrupted Milli. "I told my guard, just before they came and changed him."

Abbot groaned.

Hakin continued hurriedly: "So Dolf plans to leave at once. He is already rounding up his followers. Come on! We must get out ahead of him!"

An uproar could be heard drawing near in the corridor outside. Abbot opened the door and peered out; then shut it again and whispered, "The two factions are fighting already."

"Then come on!" exclaimed Hakin.

As he spoke he turned on the lights, wedged the door tight against its gaskets and threw the switch which started the water seeping into the storeroom; then he led Romehl hurriedly to one of the two submarines, while George and Milli rushed to the other. Heavy blows sounded against the storeroom door.

The water rapidly rose about them, and the four

friends crawled inside the two machines and clamped the lids tight. Then they waited for sufficient depth, so that they could get under way.

The water rose above their bow windows, but suddenly and inexplicably it began to subside again. A man waded by around the bow of Abbot's machine.

"They've crashed in the door, and are pumping out the water again!" exclaimed Abbot. "We're trapped!"

"Not yet!" grimly replied the girl at his side. "Can you work the radio door controls?"

"Yes."

"Then quick! Open the doors into the lock!"

He pressed a button. Ahead of them two gates swung inward, followed by a deluge of water.

"Come on!" spoke the girl. "Full speed ahead, before the water gets too low."

Abbot did so. Out into the lock they sped, in the face of the surging current. Then Abbot pushed another button to close the gates behind them. But the water continued to fall, and they grounded before they reached the end of the lock. Quite evidently the rush of the current had kept the doors from closing behind them. The city was being flooded through the broken door of the storeroom.

But Abbot opened the next gate, and again they breasted the incoming torrent. This time, although the level continued to fall, their craft did not quite ground.

"They must have got the gates shut behind us at last," said he, as he opened the next set and pressed on.

And then he had an idea. Why not omit to close any further gates behind him? As a result, the sea pressure would eventually break down the inmost barriers, and destroy the city as effectively as Dolf's bomb would have done. But he said nothing to Milli of this plan: she might wish to save her people.

Gate after gate they passed. This was too simple. A few more locks and they would be out in open water. The submarine of Hakin and Romehl swept by—evidently to let George and Milli know their presence—and then dropped behind again. But was it their two friends after all? It might have been some enemy! They could not be sure.

This uncertainty cast a chill of apprehension over them, which was immediately heightened by the sudden extinguishing of the overhead lights of the tunnel. Abbot pressed the radio button for the next set of locks, but they did not budge.

"What can be the matter?" he asked frantically.

"My people must have turned off the electric current," Milli replied. "The gates won't open without electricity to feed the motors. We're trapped again."

For a moment they lay stunned by a realization that their escape was blocked.

"Kiss me good-by, dear," breathed Milli. "This is the

end."

As the young man reached over to take her in his arms, the submarine was suddenly lifted up and spun backward, end over end: then tumbled and bumped along, as though it were a chip on an angry mountain torrent.

Stunned and bruised and bleeding, the young American finally lost consciousness....

When he came to his senses again, his first words were, "Milli, where are you?"

"My darling!" breathed a voice at his side. "Are you all right?"

"Yes," he replied. "Where are we? What has happened?"

"The entire system of locks must have crashed in and flooded the city," said she.

Instantly Abbott's mind grasped the explanation of

this occurrence: their leaving open so many gates behind them had made it impossible for the few remaining gates ahead to withstand the terrific pressures of the ocean depths, and they had crumpled. But he did not tell Milli his part in this.

She continued, "I was pretty badly shaken up myself, but I've got this boat going again, and we're on our way out of the tunnel. See—I've found out how to work our searchlight."

He looked. A broad beam of light from their bow, illuminated the tunnel ahead of them.

Presently another beam appeared, shooting by them from behind.

"Hakin and Romehl!" exclaimed the girl. "Then they're safe, too!"

The tunnel walls grew rough, then disappeared. They were out in the open sea at last, although still one mile beneath the surface.

But in front of them was an angry seething school of the man-sharks, clearly illumined by the two rays of light. Behind the sharks were a score or more of serpentine steeds.

The sharks saw the two submarines and charged down upon them; but Milli, with great presence of mind, shut off her searchlight and swung sharply to the left.

"Up! Up!" urged the young man, so she turned the craft upward.

On and on they went, with no interference. Presently they turned the light on again, so as to see what progress they were making. But they were making absolutely none! They were merely standing on their tail. They had reached a height of such relatively low pressure that it took all the churning of their propeller just merely to counteract the great weight of their submarine.

Abbot switched on their chemical gas supply, and as their top fin expanded into a balloon they again began

to rise.

One thing, however, perplexed the young man: the water about him seemed jet black rather than blue. They must by now be close to the surface of the sea, where at least a twilight blue should be visible. Even at the one mile depth in his bathysphere, the water had been brilliant, yet here, almost at the surface, he could see absolutely nothing.

He switched on the searchlight again to make sure that their window wasn't clouded over; but it wasn't.

Then suddenly a rippling veil of pale silver appeared ahead; then a blue-black sky and twinkling stars. They had reached the surface, and it was night.

He pointed out the stars to the girl at his side, then swung the nose of the submarine around and showed her the moon.

Where next? George Abbot picked out his position by the stars and headed east. East across the Pacific, toward America.

But soon he noticed that their little craft was dropping beneath the surface. He kept heading up more and more; he threw the lever for more and more chemical gas; yet still they continued to sink.

"Milli!" he exclaimed, "we've got to get out of here!"

She clutched him in fear, for to her the pressure of the open sea meant death, certain death. But he pushed her firmly away, and unclamped the lid of the submarine. In another instant he had hauled her out and was battling his way to the surface, while their little boat sunk slowly beneath them.

Milli was an experienced swimmer, for the undersea folk enjoyed the privilege of a large indoor pool. As soon as she found that the open sea did not kill her, she became calm.

Side by side they floated in the moonlight. The sky began to pink in the east. Dawn came, the first dawn that Milli had ever seen.

Suddenly she called George's attention to two

bobbing heads some distance away in the path of light the rising sun made on the ocean.

"Hakin and Romehl!" he exclaimed. Long since they had given them up for dead; but evidently fate had treated them in much the same way as themselves.

And a moment later his own salt-stung eyes noticed a long gray shape to one side.

As the day brightened, Abbot suddenly noticed a large bulking shape nearby.

It was his own boat!—the one which had lowered him into the depths in his bathysphere so many weeks and weeks ago! Evidently it was still sticking around, grappling for his long dead body.

"Come on, dear," said he, and side by side they swam over to it.

He helped her up the ship's ladder. The ship's cook sleepily stuck his head out of the galley door.

"Hullo, Mike," sang out George Abbot merrily to the astonished man. "I've brought company for breakfast. And there'll be two more when we can lower a boat."

98 Brood of the Dark Moon by Charles Willard Diffin

summary goes here

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

one blow on the nearest face



- - -

99 If the Sun Died by Roman Frederick Starzl

Tens of millenniums after the Death of the Sun there comes a young man who dares to open the Frozen Gate of Subterranea.

Aproximate word count: 8,700

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

By our system of time we would have called it around 65,000 A. D., but in this cavern world, miles below the long-forgotten surface of the earth, it was 49,889. Since the Death of the Sun. That legendary sun was but a dim racial memory, but the 24-hour day, based on its illusory travel across the sky, was still maintained by uranium clocks, by which the myriads who dwelt in the galleries and maze of the under-world warrens regulated their lives.

In the office of the nation's central electro-plant sat a young man. He was unoccupied at the moment. He

was an example of the marvelously slow process of evolution, for, to all outward appearances he differed little from a Twentieth Century man. Keen intelligence sat on his fine-cut, kindly young face. In general build he was lighter, more refined than a man of the past. Yet even the long, delicately colored robe of mineral silk which he wore could not detract from his obvious virility and strength.

His face flashed in a smile when a girl suddenly appeared in the middle of the room, materializing, so it seemed, out of nowhere. She resembled him to some extent, except that she was exquisitely feminine, dark-haired, with a skin of warm ivory, while he was blond and ruddy. Her tinkling, silvery voice was troubled as she asked:

"Have I your leave to stay, Mich'l Ares?"

The look of adoration he gave her was answer enough, but he answered with the conventional formula, "It is given." He rose to his feet, walked right through the seemingly solid vision and made an adjustment on a bank of dials. Then he walked

through the apparition again and, standing beside his chair, looked at her inquiringly.

"You haven't forgotten, Mich'l, this is the day of the Referendum?"

Mich'l smiled slightly. It would be a day of confusion in Subterranea if he should forget. As chief of the technies he was in direct charge of the tabulating machines that would, a few seconds after the vote, give the result in the matter of the opening of the Frozen Gate. But the girl's concern sobered him instantly. On the decision of the people at noon depended the life work of her father, Senator Mane. And it was now nine o'clock.

"I am sure they will order the Gate opened," he said instantly. "All the technies are agreed that your father is right, that the Great Cold was only another, more severe ice age—not the death of the Sun. The technies—"

Just as the girl had seemingly materialized, a young man now stood beside her. In appearance he was a

picture of pride, power, arrogance, and definite danger. His hawk-like, patrician features were smiling. This olive-skinned, dark young rival of Mich'l was Lane Mollon, son of Senator Mollon, ruthless administration leader and bitter opponent of Senator Mane's Exodus faction.

Lane looked at Mich'l insolently.

"Have I your leave to stay, Mich'l Ares?" he asked.

"It is given," said Mich'l without enthusiasm.

"I'm not calling on you of my own will, Mich'l," the apparition of young Mollon said contemptuously, "but Nida had the telucid turned on as I stepped into the room."

"It's as well for you that you're not here personally," Mich'l replied promptly. "The last time we met I believe I was obliged to knock you down."

Lane Mollon flushed, with a sidelong glance at Nida. The girl gave Mich'l a frightened look.

Lane interpreted her concern rightly.

"Ordinarily it's not safe to try anything like that with me. I could have you executed in half an hour. But I don't have to call on the State to punish you. Nida, you'll admit I'm taking no unfair advantage of him?"

"Oh, I do, Lane, but—"

Lane reached out his hand to the dial, invisible to Mich'l, which operated the telucid apparatus, and immediately the apparitions vanished. Mich'l looked at his own telucid, its great unwinking eye set in the wall. But he did not project his own illusory body to the girl's home. He was a technie—one of the pitifully few trained men and women who kept the intricate automatic machinery working. On them rested the immense, stupid civilization of the caverns, and there was work to do. Mich'l felt that on this morning of her father's greatest trial Nida would pay scant attention to Lane.

Mich'l was testing some of the controls when Gobet Hanlon came in. Gobet was also a technie, and

Mich'l's special friend. Like Mich'l, he wore the light robe that was universal among the civilians in the equable climate of the caverns. He walked with the light, springy step that was somehow characteristic of the specialized class to which he belonged, as distinguished from the languid gait of the pampered, lazy populace. Attached to his girdle of flat chain links was a tiny computing machine about as large as the palm of a man's hand. For Gobet did most of the mathematical work.

"You'll want me at the tabulating section?" Gobet stated inquiringly.

"It may be well," Mich'l smiled. "For the first time in centuries, I believe, the general public is going to vote."

"Flos Entine wants to come along."

Mich'l's smile changed to a grin. He knew the pretty, willful little sweetheart of Gobet's. If she wanted to be at the tabulating plant she would be there.

"In fact," Gobet confessed somewhat sheepishly, "she is in the car."

The car was waiting in the gallery. It had no visible support, but hovered a few inches above the floor above one of two parallel aluminum alloy strips that stretched, like the trolley tracks of the ancients, throughout all the galleries. The ancients well knew that aluminum is repelled by magnetism, but the race had lived in the caverns for centuries before evolving an alloy that possessed this repulsive power to a degree strong enough to support a considerable weight.

Under Mich'l's guidance the car moved forward silently, through interminable busy streets with arched roofs, lined on either side with doors that led to homes, theaters and food distributing automats. Occasionally they passed public gardens, purely ornamental, in which a few specimens of vegetation were preserved. They passed multitudes of people, most of them handsome with a pampered, hot-house prettiness, but betraying the peculiar lassitude which had been sapping the energies of this once dynamic

race for millennia. Yet to-day they showed almost eagerness. The name of Leo Mane, prophet of deliverance, was on every tongue. And what was the Sun like? Like the great vita-lights that were prescribed by law and evaded by everyone, except possibly the technies? Those technies—they seemed to delight in work! Curious glances fell on the gliding car. Some work in connection with the Referendum? What must one do to vote? Oh, the telucid!

Arriving at Administration Circle, the car entered a vast excavation half a mile in diameter, possibly a thousand feet high at the dome. Here were the entrances to some of the principal Government warrens. Here also centered the streets, like radiating spokes of a wheel, on which many of the officials lived. Here the emanation bulbs were more frequent than in the galleries, so that the light was almost glaring. Guards of soldier-police, the stolid, well-fed, specialized class produced by centuries of a static civilization, were everywhere. Not in the memory of their grandparents had they done any fighting, but in their short, brightly colored tunics, flaring trousers

and little kepis they looked very smart. Their only weapon was a small tube capable of projecting a lethal light-ray.

Mich'l led his party to the audience hall. It was only a few hundred feet in diameter. At one end was the speaker's rostrum. Senator Mane was already there. He was tall, purposeful, but withal tired and wistful looking. His graying hair was cut at the nape of his neck, sweeping back from his swelling temples in a manner really suggestive of a mane. His large, luminous eyes lit up.

"Is it nearly time?"

"Yes, Senator," Mich'l said. "The nation will soon assemble."

"You have met Senator Mollon?"

"I have had the pleasure," Mich'l acknowledged with polite irony, "since Senator Mollon gives me practically all my orders."

Mollon acknowledged the tribute with a quick smile, without rising from his chair. He, too, was different from the average Subterranean in that he was forceful and aggressive, like Senator Mane. He was still youngish looking, of powerful, blocky build. His dark hair was carefully parted in the middle and brushed down sleekly. The Twentieth Century had known his prototype, the successful, powerful, utterly unscrupulous politician; and in a different sphere, that type of extra-Governmental ruler which the ancients called "gangster." It was casually discussed in Subterranea that certain of the state soldier-police were responsible for the mysterious assassinations that had so conveniently removed most of the effective resistance to Mollon's progress in the Senate. The once potent body had not held a session in ten years: didn't dare to, a cynical and indifferent public said. And a strange reluctance on the part of qualified men to accept the Presidential nomination had left that office unfilled for the past three years. Mollon, as party dictator, performed the duties of President provisionally.

Flos, mischievous as usual, rounded her great blue eyes and gazed at Mollon with an expression of rapt admiration.

"Oh, Senator," she thrilled, "I think it's wonderful of you to give Senator Mane an opportunity to debate with you. You are so kind!"

Mollon failed to detect any mockery, luckily for Flos. He looked at her with half-closed eyes.

"The public must be satisfied," he rumbled. "Senator Mane has aroused in them great hopes. A small matter might be adjusted, but only a Referendum will satisfy them in this."

"But Senator, the race is going to ruin. If we could get into the Sun again—wouldn't you want that?"

"I don't believe there is a 'Sun'," Mollon replied; then, with the candor of one who is perfectly sure of himself, added:

"If Mane were right, I still couldn't permit the Frozen

Gate to be opened. I can control the people for their own good, here; it might not be possible Outside."

A deep musical note sounded. Suddenly the myriad inhabitants of Subterranea seemed to be milling around in the room. Actually their bodies were in their dwelling cells, but their telucid images filled the hall. By a simple adjustment of the power circuit, their images, instead of being life size, were made only about an inch high, permitting the accommodation of the entire nation in the hall. Their millions of tiny voices, mingling, made a sighing sound.

Mane rose and stepped forward, raising his hand.

"Citizens of Subterranea," he began in powerful, resonant tones, and then went on to put into his address all the fervor of a lifetime of endeavor. He told them of those times in the dim past when the human race still dwelt on the surface of the earth. Of the Sun that poured out inexhaustible floods of life and light; of the green things that were grown, not only to look at, but for food for all living things before

food was made synthetically out of mined chemicals. Of the world overrun by a teeming, happy, dynamic civilization.

"Then something happened. The Sun seemed to give less light, less heat. Perhaps we ran into a cloud of cosmic dust that intercepted the Sun's rays. Perhaps the cause was to be found in some change in the Sun's internal structure. But the effects could not be doubted. Ice began to come down from the poles. Ice barriers higher than the highest towers covered the world, wiping out all life but the most energetic.

"Our ancestors, and many other advanced nations, began to burrow toward the hot interior of the earth. We to-day have no idea of the labor that went into the digging of our underground home. We are becoming degenerate. More and more of us, even those who still use the vita-lights, are becoming pale and flabby. There are hardly enough technicians to keep the automatic machinery in order. What will happen when those technicians also deteriorate, and lose the will to work? For deteriorate they must, just as Senator Mollon and his still active allies will. Just as I will, if I

live long enough. There is a great force that we never know here. It is called the cosmic ray. It never penetrates to our depth. And our vita-lights do not produce it."

He then spoke of the proposed Exodus, argued, pleaded, painted a rosy picture of the outer world, of a Sun come back, a world of brightness and life. At the conclusion of his speech a sigh arose from the assembled millions—a sigh of hope, of half belief. Had the vote been taken then the Frozen Gate would have been opened.

But Senator Mollon was on the rostrum, holding up a square, well manicured hand for attention. In his deep rumbling bass he tore the arguments for the Exodus to shreds. With the whip of fear he drove away hope.

"If our savage ancestors lived on the inhospitable outer shell of the earth," he shouted, "is that a reason for our taking that retrograde step? Read your histories. What happened to our neighboring nation of Atlantica only a short 15,000 years ago? They did just

as this man is urging—opened their outer gate. It promptly froze open, and liquid air, the remnant of what in primordial days was an outer atmosphere, poured down the tunnels. The whole nation died, and we saved ourselves only by blasting the connecting passages between them and us with fulminate."

A wave of fear passed over the tiny massed figures. For centuries the race had been rapidly losing all initiative, except for those few leaders who, through superior stamina and religious devotion to the artificial sun-rays, had maintained something of their pristine energy.

Now they were hysterical with fear of the unknown. Even as Mich'l Ares adjusted the parabolic antenna of the thought-receptor vote-counting machine, he knew what the verdict would be. In a moment the vote was flashed on a screen on the ceiling: 421 in favor of the Exodus and 2,733,485 against it. There was an eery cheer from the people, and they began to dissolve like smoke. Mollon rose, bowed politely and smilingly, and walked out to where his magnetic car awaited him.

It was with a feeling of deep depression that Mich'l Ares went to work the next morning. His despair was shared by the technies under him with whom he talked. At the telestereo station he found a bitter young man broadcasting a prepared commentary on the election ordered by Senator Mollon. It was congratulatory in nature, designed to confirm popular opinion that the nation had been saved from a great catastrophe and to glorify the principles of Mollon's party.

"... And so once more this great nation has demonstrated its ability to govern itself, to protect itself against dangerous and unsocial experiments. The voice of the people is the voice of God. The Government claims for itself no credit for this momentous decision. Each citizen has done his share toward the continuation of our safety, our prosperity...."

The young man finished the document, smiled a charming smile, and turned off the switch. Then he grimaced his disgust and lapsed into a glum meditation.

"What say, Kratz?" Mich'l asked.

"Trouble again on the west sector. Had trouble getting power enough. Generators ought to be overhauled." He made a helpless gesture.

"How about conscripting a little labor?"

"Tried it this morning. Most of the people are still in a daze from chewing too much merclite. Those that're sober are too busy preening themselves for voting on the winning side."

Kratz informed Mich'l that Mollon had that morning given up all pretense of constitutional government, had preempted the treasury, and was consolidating his position as avowed dictator.

"He probably wanted to do that a long time," Mich'l commented. "He didn't quite dare till that Referendum yesterday gave him the real measure of the public. Well, I've got to be going."

Mich'l took one of the small mechanical service

tunnels back to his office. This latest news had hardly affected him, so keen was his disappointment over the defeat of the Exodus. But he wanted to be alone. He walked through vast halls full of machinery, abandoned and rusting, through dark corridors that had once roared with industrial life. What would happen when the present overloaded machinery should break down; wear out? The remnants of the great technical army could hardly serve what was left. Each passing year these silent, useless hulks became more numerous. The specter of famine was stalking amid the dusty pipes and empty vats of the chemical plants; the horrors of darkness lurked amid the tarnished compression spheres and the long, hooded monstrosities of the power plants, inadequately served by harassed and overworked technicians.

In the middle of his office Mich'l found the telucid counterpart of Mila, sister of Nida Mane. She was younger than Nida, hardly more than sixteen. Her eyes were wide with terror as she sought Mich'l. Her cheeks were wet with tears, and her silken brown hair fell in careless disarray.

"Mich'l!" she cried, as soon as she saw him. "Lane Mollon has taken Nida!"

"Taken her!"

"And Father is under arrest. Lane came this morning, crazy with merclite gum. He had four or five soldiers with him. When Nida refused to see him they broke down the door and went to her room. They dragged her out to Lane's car, and he took her to his warren near the Presidential quarters."

"She there now?"

"Yes. Father followed Lane's car. Guards kept him out of Lane's warren, so he went to see Mollon. That devil only laughed at him, offered to call another Referendum. Father had a small pocket needle-ray and—"

"Good! He killed Mollon?"

"No. But he managed to burn a hole through his arm. He was rushed off to one of the cells. And Mollon says

he will call a Referendum to decide Father's fate."

"It would be just like that devil's sense of humor to let the people decree their only friend's death."

"They'll do it, too!" Mila exclaimed tragically. "Oh, how I wish Mother were alive!"

"And each one will feel deep within him that he has done a great, commendable and original thing!" Mich'l added, with keen insight.

Mila sank to the floor.

"Go to your room," Mich'l said, gently stern. "Mollon and his gang have reckoned without the technies." A woman's image appeared, stooping commiseratingly over Mila—a friend of the family. Mich'l ordered her to care for Mila. Then, he took a deep breath. Gone was his feeling of helpless sorrow, leaving only an overwhelming, steady, satisfying anger. He flung the telucid switch, barked cracking orders.

In half an hour every technical man of Subterranea

was in a large storeroom near Mich'l's office. They were mostly young, keen and alert, their skins red or brown from the actinic lights, their hair showing more or less bleaching from the same cause. As Mich'l talked they became intent: they listened with a cold, deadly silence that would perhaps have made the smug millions of Subterranea quake with fear.

This affront put upon the only man in the Government who could speak their language, who could comprehend their ideals: the peril of the girl they all knew and loved: these things set their long-repressed resentment flaring to white heat. They were ready for desperate things. A turn of a valve and water would thunder through the maze of galleries; a mishap far, far down toward the earth's hot core, and steam would rush up—

But Mich'l steadied them. After all, Subterranea was their country. Anarchy was far from the technic ideals. He had a plan.

"Nothing is to be done until we have Senator Mane and Nida," Mich'l instructed them. "Remember that!

Do nothing until you hear from me. Each of you go to your station. Set all adjustments so that they will not need attention for some weeks, at least. Those of you who have families, tell them to be ready to move to another residence. Say nothing about any trouble—understand?"

There were nods of assent.

"You will proceed to your posts and keep busy. When I come it'll be by telucid. I will say nothing. I will simply wave my hand. That means you are to take your wives, your families, your sweethearts, to Substation No. 37X."

There were audible gasps.

"Not 37X!" exclaimed one of the older men. "Why, that's twenty miles up, near the Frozen Gate!"

"Yes!" Mich'l smiled with tight lips. "You men willing?"

There was an instantaneous shout of approval. Curiously enough, seizure of the Gate by force had

not occurred to any of this law-abiding, well-disciplined group. But Mollon's lawless seizure of the Government had removed all inhibitions of that sort. Seizure of the Gate would bring at one stroke the realization of the dream that the technies had tried for generations to win by political means. Surely, when the Gate was open, and they could see the glorious, half-mythical Sun for themselves, the people would consent to the Exodus!

For the technies, even in the bitterness of defeat, were not anti-social. They hoped and worked for the devitalized races of Subterranea, for the betterment of their condition, more than for their own. The technies were the fittest; they had demonstrated their ability to survive unchanged under adverse condition. They would be least helped by the Exodus. Yet they had worked for it all their lives, as had their fathers before them, out of unselfish love for humanity. There have always been such men. Through the murk of history we see their lives as small, steady lights, infrequent and lonely. With the opening of the Frozen Gate suddenly a possibility, the technies forgot their

exasperation with the stupid mob.

"The Gate is guarded," said an elderly man dubiously.

"A small guard," Gobet Hanlon remarked quickly,
"and probably dazed with merclite. Nothing to fear."

"Stay away from the Gate," Mich'l instructed. "Give no cause for alarm. If an emergency arises while I'm gone, see Gobet."

"Don't go alone, Mich'l," Gobet begged. "A few of us with ray-needles can storm the detention cells. We can clean out Lane's warren."

"We might, but the Senator and Nida would be gone. The alarm would be given. In a few minutes there'd be a mob."

The technies were already dispersing eagerly. Mich'l pressed his friend's hand, saying:

"I'll take my needle-ray, and I know every way to get around there is. Alone, I'll attract no attention. Till

later, Gobet!" And he was gone.

Mich'l's way was through the smaller, less frequented communication passages used principally by the technies. Occasionally he did meet citizens, still light-headed after their election victory celebration, and lost, but he paid them no heed. He came to the ventilation center of that level.

For ages no air had entered Subterranea from the outside. All of the air had to be regularly reconditioned, and so was returned, through a systematic network of air ducts, to a vast, central chemical plant. It was a latter-day Cave of the Winds, where the north, south, east and west winds of that buried empire regularly returned for a brief few minutes of play amid chemical sprays, condensers, humidifiers, oxydisers, to be again dispatched to their drudgery. This hall was truly colossal, filled to the shadowy ceilings, a thousand feet high, with gigantic pipes, tanks, wind-turbines.

The technie in charge had not yet returned, but Mich'l consulted the distribution plan, and soon located the

duct that led to Lane Mollon's warren. In a few minutes he was running, helped along by a strong current of fresh air. The map had shown the warren to be about a mile away. For the benefit of the technicians who had to work there, the duct was plainly marked; and the lighting, by infrequent emanation bulbs, was adequate, though dim.

Mich'l had made no plans for a course of action after arriving at his destination. He felt reasonably sure that if he could get into the warren he would have a good chance to escape with Nida. In the confusion he could hide her nearby, and perhaps effect the release of the senator also. He had no doubt about his fate if he were caught. Lane's pose of good sportsmanship having failed to impress Nida, he had adopted simple, brutal coercion. Mich'l's fate, if caught interfering, would be summary execution.

Mich'l found the grating which he sought. It bore the key number of Lane's establishment. The key which would unlock it was of course in the hands of the police; but the bars were badly corroded, and Mich'l managed to bend them enough to permit the passage

of his body.

He found himself in a small chamber, from which ducts led to all parts of the warren. These ducts were too small to permit passage of his body, however; it would be necessary to come into the open. A small metal door promised egress. Mich'l climbed out, and faced a surprised cook in the kitchen, engaged in flavoring synthetic food drinks. Mich'l said explanatorily:

"Inspection, air service."

The cook did not know the regulations about keeping the air tunnels locked. Moreover, he, like all other servants of the mighty, worked unwillingly, being conscripted. He only grunted.

Mich'l made a pretense of testing the air currents. Presently he stepped into one of the communicating corridors. The warren was planned something like a house of the Surface Age, with luxuriously furnished rooms, baths, dining halls, and all the appurtenances of wealth. Arriving at a rotunda, in the center of

which was a glowing fountain, Mich'l encountered a guard. Boldly he asked him:

"Where is Mr. Mollon? I wish to see him."

The guard looked surprised.

"About Nida Mane, sir? I would hardly dare."

Mich'l looked at the man sharply, but there was no hint of recognition in the stupid, phlegmatic face.

"What about Nida Mane? It is about her I wish to speak."

There was a slight stirring of interest in the soldier's face.

"He will be glad to see you, sir, if you bring news of her."

"Eh, yes? Perhaps what I have to tell will be of no interest to him."

"If you can tell him where she is he will ask no more

of you."

"She made good her escape then?"

Slow suspicion was dawning at last.

"For one who brings news you ask a lot of questions," the guard remarked heavily, as his hand slipped to the needle-ray weapon at his side. "Show your pass!"

Like a flash Mich'l was upon him, his hand at the thick throat, the other grasping the wrist. Although the soldier, like the majority of the populace, lacked the intense vitality of the technies, he had stubborn strength, and he fought effectively in the drilled, automatic way of his kind. Mich'l was further handicapped by the necessity of maintaining silence. One shout, and a dozen needle-rays would no doubt perforate his body with holes and slash his flesh with smoldering cuts.

Grunting and sweating, they fought all around the rose-colored curb of the fountain. At last Mich'l succeeded in forcing his adversary over the low stone,

and they went over together with a resounding splash. The straining body of the guard suddenly relaxed, and a spreading red cloud in the water disclosed that he had struck his head against the first of the terraces that rose in the fountain's mist-shrouded center.

Up one of the corridors a door opened, and an angry voice shouted:

"Gurka! Gurka! I'll have you in bracelets! Captain of the guard!"

"Sir!" From another of the corridors came a sound of running feet. A command rang out:

"On the double!"

An officer, followed by four soldiers, dashed around the corner and flashed by the fountain. Peering over the curb, Mich'l saw them, some hundred yards away, come to a halt before an opened door. With a thrill of exultation Mich'l recognized the tall figure of Lane Mollon, looking like a slightly damaged satyr of the

better class, for his head was bandaged, and he was in bad humor.

"Captain!" he stormed. "I want you to put that damned louse in solitary confinement for a year. Hear?"

"Yes, sir." Like a megaphone the long corridor carried the low, respectful words to Mich'l's ears.

Lane continued to storm:

"And if you put another damned merclite-crazy blunker* on guard in this place I'll have your commission. Hear?"

"Yes, sir."

(Blunker—a blunderer, an oaf. Mechanical recording had preserved the language in much of its original form, but new words did creep in.)

A quick decision was necessary, and Mich'l acted without hesitation. The guard had rolled over on his

back, so that his face was out of the water, and he was breathing with quick, painful gasps. Mich'l dragged him up under the concealing shelter of the fountain spray, and there changed clothes with him. In the meantime the flowing water washed away the red stain of blood. When the captain returned with his guard, Mich'l was lying realistically in the pool, apparently deep in drugged sleep, the little kepi tilted rakishly over his face.

He was roughly seized and dragged out of the water to the accompaniment of much cursing. A fist crashed into his face.

Suddenly the soldiers felt the supine figure under their hands explode into energy. Elbows and fists seemed to fly from all directions at once. A needle-ray appeared, and before they could draw their own weapons they were howling with pain as searing welts drew over their bodies. With one accord they plunged into the pool. Only the officer remained, and he fell to the mosaic floor, his weapon half raised, the small black hole in his chest giving off a burnt odor.

Mich'l appropriated the officer's brassard of rank, and, menacing the cowed guards, forced them to herd into a nearby room, carrying the body of the officer with them. Mich'l locked the door and looked around. He saw no one observing him, and could count on carrying a pretty good bluff in his uniform, which was rapidly shedding its water. With a firm step Mich'l walked to Lane Mollon's door, threw it open, and entered.

Mane sat up on his couch, his feet striking the floor with an angry thump. But when he recognized Mich'l he paled slightly.

"Where is she?" Mich'l demanded roughly, "before I burn you down!"

"You said once," Lane began sneeringly, "that you wanted to fight me. Now, if you'll just put down that —"

"Not now," Mich'l dissented with deadly coldness. "Where is Nida? Speak fast."

Lane did so.

"She isn't here. The little short* crowned me with a chair, and slipped out. How did I—"

(Short—trouble-maker, spitfire. A colloquialism probably growing out of the once frequently used electrical term "short-circuit.")

"When? Hurry up!"

"Hardly an hour ago. She walked down the corridor, showed a thick-witted guard my own executive pass, and got away. But I got that guard—"

"Never mind what you did to the guard—"

Suddenly the image of an officer strange to Mich'l stood in the room and saluted smartly.

"Has Captain Ilgen Mr. Lane Mollon's leave to stay?" he asked.

Mollon started forward, but before he could disclose

his predicament Mich'l had sidled over to him and thrown one arm affectionately over his shoulder. In his hand, concealed by the rich folds of Lane's robe, Mich'l held his needle-ray, and it was pressed firmly against Lane's ribs.

"Mr. Mollon will be glad to hear you," Mich'l said smoothly.

He fancied that the eyes of the officer's image dilated slightly, but it lost none of its military rigor. But some explanation of his presence there in his still damp uniform must be given Ilgen, so he growled, in a voice that he tried to make a bit thick, as if he had chewed too much merclite:

"At ease, Captain. At ease! Damn it man, you don't have to be so damned military. You're among friends!" And he towseled Lane's dark hair affectionately.

Captain Ilgen looked his disgust.

"Sir," he said to Lane, "we recaptured Nida Mane as she tried to board a public car near the Executive

Mansion."

The black lens at the end of Mich'l's needle-ray pressed hard, and Lane said naturally:

"You have her in custody?"

"Sir, we have." And to Mich'l's dismay, Nida, defiant, her lovely form half revealed by rents in her garments, seemed to materialize beside the officer. Her wrathful eyes were fixed on Lane, and then she saw Mich'l.

The technie put all his will into the pleading stare which he returned, and she understood. She gave no sign of recognition, but favored both Lane and Mich'l equally with the chill of her disdain.

"Sir, what are your orders?"

Lane glanced aside at Mich'l, acutely conscious of the lethal pressure in his ribs.

"Sall right with me, old fellow," Mich'l squawked

good-humoredly. "This your girl that got away from you? Let's both go over and bring her back."

Lane nodded assent. The soldier saluted, and his vision and that of the girl disappeared.

"And we're going to do just that!" Mich'l added in an entirely changed voice. "Get up, you. Act right, speak right, do right, and you may live to see another day."

So the two left the warren in apparent amity, and walked the beautiful street, with its richly formed, brightly colored arches, its seemingly illimitable vistas, its luxuriant, pampered decorative vegetation, its blazing lights—until at last they came to Administration Circle, and entered the ponderous gates behind which lay the very heart of the Government.

They were challenged at once. Although the officer of the guard knew Lane, usage required the showing of the daily pass. Many high officers of the Government had in years past fallen from grace overnight.

This formality complied with, Lane and Mich'l, the latter with his ray-needle ever ready, sat down to wait in the guard room. And Lane, under Mich'l's quiet prompting, ordered that Nida and her father be brought to him.

"We shall bring the girl, yes," the astonished officer protested, "but not Senator Mane. He is a prisoner of state."

"Perhaps you don't know, Captain," Mich'l suggested smoothly, "that it is not wise to disregard the orders of the Provisional President's son?"

"It would cost me my commission, perhaps my life!" the officer said.

"Neither would be worth much if you disobey!" Mich'l countered, a wire edge creeping into his voice.

The officer looked into Lane's stormy face, then with great reluctance retreated to carry out the order.

In about ten minutes he was back, with four guards

and his prisoners. He explained that Captain Ilgen was detained on official duty.

"You may go," said Lane, prompted by a jab in the ribs.

"A written receipt, please, sir, for the senator."

Glowering, Lane wrote out the desired document. At last they were alone.

"Our program," Mich'l announced briskly, "is simple. You will conduct us to one of the Government cars, and will ride with us to such places as we may direct, and I shall release you when it pleases me. If you then want to fight, I will accommodate you."

"I would be willing to fight you, as head of the technies," Lane countered sullenly, "but I wouldn't be bothered with a rebel and a traitor. You've overstepped yourself this time, my fine bolthead, and all I ask is a front seat at your execution!"

They stepped into the brightly lighted hall, and in that

instant Mich'l felt a searing heat on his shoulder. Without a moment's pause he hurled Senator Mane and the girl back into the room. At the same moment he flung an arm around Lane's neck and pulled him back into the doorway, where he could use him as a shield while he cautiously peered out into the corridor. His shoulder throbbed painfully, but his movement had prevented the needle-ray from penetrating deeply in any one place.

A short distance up the corridor was a wider space, in the center of which stood a large bronze urn filled with exotic plants. Behind this urn were several soldiers, and Mich'l recognized the sharp-eyed Captain Ilgen. So that officer had recognized the true state of affairs, or had strong suspicions! But in his haste and eagerness he had overlooked one important fact. In the guardroom, were riot-rays, heavy replicas of the ordinary hand weapons. They had not been needed for many years, but the technies had always kept them fully charged and in order.

"Nida!" Mich'l called, not removing his eye from the doorway.

"Yes?" She was standing beside him, and Mich'l thrilled to the admiration and positive affection in her intonation.

"Notice those short tubes mounted on light wheels over against the walls? Those are riot-ray projectors. Wheel me over a couple."

Nida did as directed. Mich'l stuck the stubby muzzle of one of the nearest weapons into the corridor, pulled the lever and swung the ray in an arc toward the ambushed soldiers. There was a sharp crackling noise and the heat chipped myriads of flakes off the stone walls, leaving a gray path across the rich murals, and the air was filled with flying particles. The heat was terrific. It beat back into the doorway.

Captain Ilgen gave a short, sharp order, and he and his men retreated before the bronze urn began to wilt and drip melted metal. He could not be accused of cowardice, for his hand weapons were puny compared to the riot-rays.

"Quick, before he gets in touch with the outer guard!"

Mich'l urged his prisoner forward, Senator Mane following. The grave patriarch of rhetoric made a striking picture as he dragged the second riot-ray along. The other one was abandoned, locked with full power on. It was converting that corridor into an inferno, and there would be no pursuit through that avenue.

Mich'l pushed open the metal door suddenly. Two guards on duty were just coming in, their hand weapons ready. They never knew what struck them for there was no time for compunction. But even as their bodies sank to the paving there was the harsh clangor of alarm bells. Soldiers dashed from everywhere and came running, their needle-rays menacing.

"In there!" Mich'l shouted. He pointed to the doors, at the dead guards. As they hesitated, he added:

"Revolution! They're storming the President's office! Hear the rays?"

Through the doors came a faint humming, an acrid

smell of heat, of stone and metal fumes. A corporal saluted Mich'l, recognized Lane's haggard features, and Lane again felt that cogent persuader in his ribs.

"That's right, Corporal!" he said bitterly.

"Is the guard room occupied, sir?"

"Not now, you fool!" Mich'l snapped at him. This resolved the last of the corporal's misgivings. Giving an order, he led his men in, gasping.

"Now we'll run!" Mich'l ordered, giving Lane a shove. "Coming, Nida?" She was dragging her father along joyously. They crossed the broad pedestrian walk, and in the street found an official car nestling on one of the tracks.

"Heave in the riot-ray, will you, old fellow?" Mich'l requested jovially, and Lane did. Then the listless chauffeur turned a controller, and the big car rose a few inches, lightly as a feather, and sped away swiftly through the maze of traffic.

Sometime later they were in a service lift; not one of the great public lifts that carried their hundreds at a trip, but one of the small lifts used mostly by the technies, and known to few outside their ranks. Mich'l, standing blissfully close to Nida and her father, enjoyed his moment of relaxation. Many things had been attended to. Lane had been released at last, in one of the catacomb cemeteries. It would take him at least two hours to find his way out. They were discussing the riot-ray, which they had with them.

"I hope we won't have to exhaust it in a fight before we get out," Senator Mane said anxiously. "It would be a splendid weapon if we encounter a hostile environment Outside."

"The Gate is guarded," Mich'l said practically, "but we expect to surprise them. No use worrying."

The lift came to a stop at an air-lock. The great elevator shafts were closed by airlocks every 2,000 feet. The reason is obvious. If the air of the great, spheroid subterranean nation were allowed to freely obey the laws of gravity, it would be oppressively

dense in the lower levels, and excessively rarified in the upper ones. While the airlocks were operating Mich'l stepped to a telucid and gave the agreed-on signal.

In another half hour they were at 37X. The great, dusty, and little-used storeroom was only poorly lighted; it was dank, and had an uncomfortable chill. Technies and their families were coming in from all sides, and it was not long before some five hundred persons, men, women and children, were assembled. Many of them were pale and frightened looking, for they were staking everything on an ideal, a theory. There would be no coming back. The statute books of Subterranea decreed only one penalty—death—for even the merest tampering with the Frozen Gate. It was not like this that they had visioned the opening of the Gate. Under properly controlled conditions, it would have been possible to open the gate for preliminary explorations. But not now. They were outside the law.

Nida, standing beside Mich'l, shivered and pulled her over-robe closer around her. There was sadness in her

voice as she said:

"These children.... They remind me of the thousands of children we must abandon with our people. If I could, I'd steal a few to take with us."

Mich'l grinned without mirth.

"And be damned as a kidnapper of a particularly horrible sort, as long as Subterranea lasts!"

"I know. I know. But what will happen to them all when the automatic machinery fails?"

"They may learn to run it, if they have to. Or if we succeed in establishing ourselves in the outer world we can tunnel back to them around the Gate in a year or so. Don't worry about them too much. We're taking the big risk, not they."

Gobet Hanlon, accompanied by Flos Entine and Mila Mane, approached. He was loaded down with a huge case of concentrated food.

"I've given orders to bring with us all the cold resisting fabrics we could carry. Got 'em loaded down, eh?"

"All here?"

"Every last one."

"Let's go, then." Mich'l stepped to a small door that led into the main corridor close to the Gate. This door had not been used by the technies when assembling. Through a tiny hole the guard, four soldiers, could be seen about a blanket, tossing sixteen-sided dice. Mich'l opened the door, his needle-ray pointed.

"Don't move, or you burn!" he commanded harshly.

The guards, taken completely by surprise, did not move. In a few moments they were bound, gagged, and dumped into a corner of 37X. Eager technies were swarming over the complicated mechanism that they had dared to touch, before, only for inspection and maintenance. The Frozen Gate was like a huge stopper in a bottle, made of chromium steel. It was

thirty feet in diameter, and thirty feet thick from its well insulated inside face to that enigmatical Outside that had been a grisly mystery to the race for some five hundred centuries.

There was a flash of sparks, and the quiet hum of motors. With a shuddering groan the great plug freed itself from the grip of millennia; turned a few inches in its hole. The supporting gimbals took the load now, and slowly the great mass moved inward, carried by an overhead traveling crane whose track was bolted to the rock roof. The rate of movement was slow, not much over three or four inches a minute.

An excited murmur filled the cavern—almost hysterical joy. But Mich'l, watching that widening margin for the dreaded gush of liquid air, only trembled with relief. At least the calamity that had visited rash Atlantica would not be repeated here.

A young technie, one of the heat distributors, climbed up the heavy bosses on the gateway's face.

"I'm going to be the first to see the Sun!" he shouted

joyously. His challenging gaze roved over the waiting crowd, and suddenly his face turned ashen. For at the turn of the corridor, some hundred yards away, he had seen men. No mistaking those uniforms; they were soldiers. And Mich'l, following his gaze, saw a riot-ray being wheeled into place. His own riot-ray already commanded the corridor, but he dared not use it. The soldiers, under the partial protection of the turn, could incinerate the helpless technies with little danger to themselves.

"Wait!" Mich'l shouted, running into the open.

An officer came to meet him. He then recognized Captain Ilgen, whose exceptional shrewdness had almost undone him before. Ilgen could not see the slow movement of the gate, and Mich'l, himself weaponless, counted only on parleying for time.

They met midway between the two forces, and the small black lens of the captain's weapon pointed steadily at Mich'l's chest.

"Mich'l Ares, I arrest you." It seemed that the

captain's fine gray eyes looked out of the lean face with real sympathy. "It may be there will be executive clemency for these people of yours, but for you—"

Mich'l, tense and deadly, saw the captain's vigilant attention leave his face for a second; saw his eyes widen in consternation. He could not know that Ilgen had seen a slender crescent of green light appear in the Frozen Gate, but he did not lose the opportunity. His fist crashed on the captain's jaw, so that the soldierly figure reeled and the needle-ray fell to the ground. Mich'l leaped after him, picked him up, held him. The riot-ray was turned full on him, and a soldier's hand trembled on the lever. But it did not pull.

"You'll kill him!" Mich'l shouted. And then he ventured to turn his head to look at the Gate. He saw the first of the fugitives struggle into the narrow crack. The gate seemed to have stuck, and there was barely room to pass. Ilgen, half conscious, was trying to rain blows on Mich'l's back, compelling him to stop and pass the officer's hands through the belt of his tunic and to manacle them with a pair of bracelets which he

found in his pocket. As he staggered toward the Gate with his burden, he saw Gobet beside him, the stolen riot-ray menacing the soldiers, who would otherwise have rushed in.

Suddenly Ilgen struggled upright.

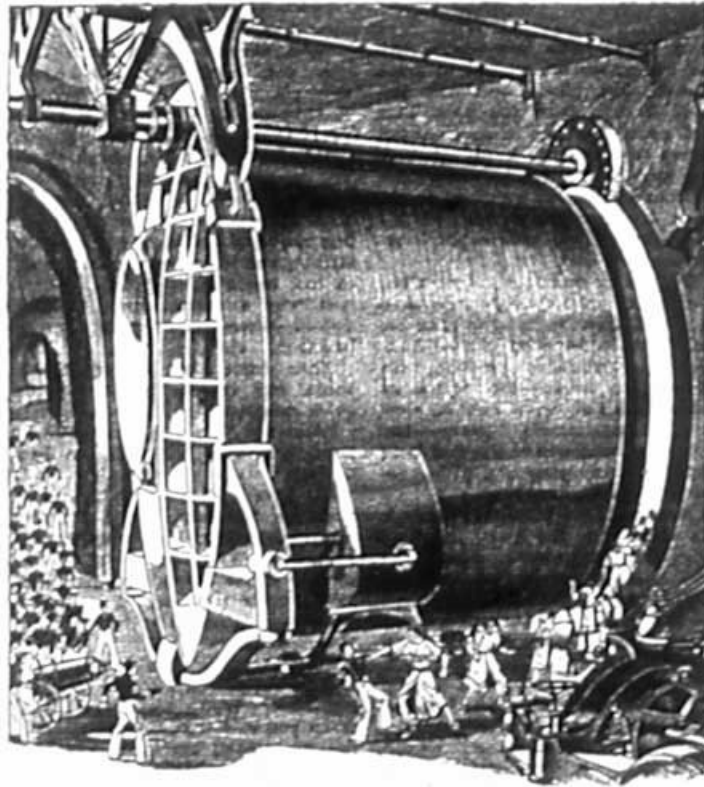
"Fire," he commanded in stentorian tones.

"They'll kill you too, you fool!" Mich'l exclaimed angrily.

"I am a soldier!" Ilgen answered with contempt. His legs barely supported his weight, and he was struggling to free his manacled hands. He threw himself into the narrow crevice of the Gate, to obstruct the stream of fugitives. He started to shout again:

"Fi—" Crack! Again Mich'l's fist caught him. He hooked the officer's elbows over two of the bosses, so that he was supported in plain sight of his men, and turned to urge haste. The last two stragglers were hurrying through, and with relief Mich'l turned to

follow. But he set the closing mechanism in motion before he leaped for the narrow opening that was becoming still narrower, though very slowly. Now for that green crescent of light, and hope!



He felt a wave of heat. Glancing back, he saw the irresolute guards scattered by the enraged charge of a square, blocky man in civilian robe—the usually smiling Provisional President, Senator Mollon. Mollon himself was fumbling with the lever of the riot-ray. Ilgen had evidently reported where he was going

before starting in pursuit of the technies.

Again that withering flash of heat, and Mich'l saw Captain Ilgen, still semi-conscious, suddenly turn red-faced. Mollon would burn him up without compunction, in the hope of catching one of the fugitive technies. And now a figure in uniform leaped forward at Mollon's angry gesture, and bent purposefully to the sighting tube.

The crescent was now so slender that Mich'l had to turn sideways to squeeze back into the corridor. And slowly, inexorably, it was growing smaller still. With desperate haste the practiced, uniformed man was adjusting his range.

Captain Ilgen struggled when Mich'l seized him.

"I arrest—"

Mich'l thought for a sickening moment that he was caught in the closing gate. Then he was free in the cylindrical tunnel into which the plug was creeping. Luckily, Ilgen was slight. His body squeezed through

with little more difficulty than Mich'l's own. Now the opening was too small for any man's body. A red glow illuminated that narrowing slit; an acrid wave of heat, and the smell of burnt metal came with the strong current of air that blew out of Subterranea.

Mich'l dragged his captive down the rocky tunnel, the floor of which dipped gently away from the Gate; for drainage, no doubt. Around a bend, the source of the greenish light was apparent. The fugitives were in an ice cavern. The light seemed to emanate from roof and walls. The air was uncompromisingly chill, for the blast of warm air from Subterranea had stopped.

But the cold of the air was nothing to the icy chill that settled on the heart of Mich'l Ares, and the hearts of Senator Mane, and the other leaders of this desperate enterprise. So this, this was the Outside! A cavern of ice—small, hemmed-in! Those ancient folk-legends of a Sun—

"I arrest you, Mich'l Ares!"

Mich'l laughed shortly. What a single-minded fellow

this Captain Ilgen was! Still groggy, of course. Didn't know where they were. He left the soldier with the red, blistered face.

"Mich'l! Mich'l!" a voice echoed shrilly from the ice walls. It was a high-pitched voice, and an excited one. A boy came flying out of a narrow crevice, his short robe flying, his cloth-wrapped legs twinkling.

"Mich'l!" he shouted. "I saw it! I saw the Sun, the beautiful Sun!"

Lucky it was that in the rush no one was hurt. The small cleft opened into a wide tunnel, a low-roofed cave through which milky-white water flowed. The cave opened upon a vista of blue sky and towering mountains whose tops were burdened with snow and upon whose sides glaciers slid down and melted; and the milky-white stream brawled down into a green valley, far, far below. On a mountain meadow, not far from the glacier that still buried the Frozen Gate, they rested....

And so came a new strain of humanity upon the

surface of the earth—a strain tempered and refined by the inexorable process of evolution and environment. Already animal life had reappeared, drastically changed and ruthlessly weeded out by the most severe Ice Age the world had ever known, and now Man stood once more on a new threshold of time.

Something of this may have passed through the minds of the refugees luxuriating in the strong sunlight of this mountain meadow, and in active and alert brains the foundations of a new civilization were already being built.

They were preparing to go into the valley below when there was a dull concussion. The glacier over the Frozen Gate rose slightly, then disappeared completely out of sight, leaving a yawning hole in the mountainside. Ice and rocks slid down, filling the hole. The refugees gazed at the scene in fear and wonder.

"They have blown up the gate! And the chambers leading to it!" Senator Mane—now only Leo Mane—said slowly. "There goes our last chance to save

them!" His tones were deeply sad. He could not look upon these people as an experiment that Nature had abandoned, although he knew that history is thronged with the shadows of vanished races, culled by the process of natural selection.

But Youth looks only ahead. The majority of the rescued technies were young, and with eagerness and anticipation, they followed Mich'l and Nida Ares down into the valley to build their first homes.

100 The Midget from the Island by Desmond Winter Hall

Garth Howard, prey to half the animals of the forest, fights valiantly to regain his lost five feet of size.

Aproximate word count: 11,700

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

In the chill of an early morning, a rowboat drifted aimlessly down the Detroit River. It seemed to have broken loose from its mooring and been swept away; its outboard motor was silent and it swung in slow circles as the currents caught at it. But the boat carried a passenger. A man's nude body stretched face downward in it.

It was a startling figure that lay there. The body was fully matured and had a splendid development of rounded muscles—and yet it was not more than three feet in length. A perfectly formed and proportioned

manikin! The two officers in the harbor police launch which presently slid alongside to investigate were giants in comparison.

They had not expected to find such weird cargo in a drifting rowboat. They stared at the naked, unconscious midget in utter amazement, as if seeing a thing that could not be real. And when one of them reached down to lift the tiny body aboard, his eyes went wider with added surprise. His lift was inadequate. The dwarf's weight was that of a normal-sized man!

This was mystery on mystery. But they got the uncannily heavy figure aboard at last and ascertained that, though the skin showed many wounds and was blue from long exposure, the heart was still beating. And realizing that the life might flicker out beneath their eyes unless they took action immediately, they proceeded to work over him.

After some minutes, the dwarf gave signs of returning consciousness. His lids fluttered and opened, disclosing eyes that filled suddenly with terror as they

stared into the faces, huge in comparison, that leaned over his. One of the officers said reassuringly:

"You're all right, buddy: you're on a harbor police launch. But who in the devil are you? D'you speak English? Where'd you come from?"

The midget struggled to speak; struggled desperately to tell something of great importance. They bent closer. Gasping, high-pitched words came to their ears, and the story that those words told held them spellbound. When the shrill voice ceased and the dwarf sank back into the coat they had thrown around him, the two policemen gazed at each other. One whistled softly, and his companion said soberly:

"We'd better phone up and have the local police tend to this right away, Bill."

Thus, two hours later, several miles up the river, another launch containing three officers came to its destination, a solitary, thickly-wooded island that brooded under a cloak of silence where the river leaves broad Lake St. Clair. The launch crept up to a

mooring post a few feet from a small, rough beach, and was tied there. Quickly, the men waded ashore and tiptoed up a winding trail that was barred from the sun by dank foliage. They soon came to a clearing where a large cabin had been built. There, one of them whispered, "Guns out!"

Then the three men crossed the clearing and cautiously entered the cabin.

For a moment there was silence. Then came a terrified shout, followed by the bunched thunder of a succession of pistol shots. The reverberations slowly died away, and some time later the policemen reappeared and stood outside the door.

One of them, dazed, kept repeating over and over, "I wouldn't have believed it! I wouldn't have believed it!" and another nodded in wordless agreement. The third, white-faced, stared for a long time unseeingly at the cloud-flecked bowl of the sky....

But it would be best, perhaps, to tell the story as it happened.

The incredible events that shaped it began two nights before, when the larger of the two rooms in the island cabin was bathed in the bald glare of a strong floodlight that threw into sharp prominence the intent features of two men in the room, and the complicated details of the strange equipment around them.

Garth Howard, the younger of the two, was holding a tiny, squawling, spitting thing, not more than three inches long, which might have seemed, at a quick glance, to have been a normal enough kitten. Closer inspection, however, would have revealed that it had a thick, smooth coat, a lithe, fully developed body and narrowed, venomous eyes—things which no week-old kitten ever possessed. It was a mature cat, but in the size of a kitten.

Howard's level gray eyes were held fascinated by it. When he spoke, his words were hushed and almost reverent.

"Perfect, Hagendorff!" he said. "Not a flaw!"

"The reduction has not improved her temper,"

Hagendorff articulated precisely. His deep voice matched the rest of him. Garth Howard's clean-muscled body stood a good six feet off the floor, yet the other topped him by inches. And his face compared well with his bulky body, for his head was massive, with overhanging brows and a shaggy mop of blond hair. Athlete and weight-lifter, the two looked, but in reality they were scientist and assistant, working together for a common end.

The room in which they stood was obviously a laboratory. Bulky gas engines and a generator squatted at one end; tables held racks of tools and loops of insulated wiring and jars of various chemicals. One long table stretched the whole length of the room, placed flush against the left wall, whose rough planking was broken by a lone window. There were racks of test tubes on this table, and tools, carelessly scattered by men intent on their work.

Still another table was devoted to several cages, containing the usual martyrs of experimental science: guinea pigs and rabbits, rats and white mice. Beside these was a large box, screen topped, in which, in

separate partitions, were a variety of insects: beetles and flies and spiders and tarantulas.

But the thing that dominated the laboratory was the machine on the long table against the wall. Its chamber, the most striking feature, was a cube of roughly six feet, built of dull material resembling bakelite. Wires trailed through it from the glittering plate, which was the chamber's floor, and a curved spray-shaped projector overhead, to an intricately constructed apparatus studded with vacuum tubes. A small switchboard stood beside the chamber, and from it thick cables led to the generator in the rear of the room.

"Let us return her to normal," Hagendorff rumbled after a moment or two devoted to prodding and examining the diminutive cat. "Then for the final experiment."

One whole wall of the cubical chamber was a hinged door, with a tier of several peep-holes. Garth Howard swung the door open, placed the tiny, struggling cat inside and quickly closed it again. "Right," he said

briefly, and pressed his eyes to the bottom peep-hole.

A switch was pulled over, and the dynamo's drone pulsed through the room. Hagendorff's fingers rested on a large lever that jutted from the switchboard. Slowly, he pulled it to one side.

The imprisoned cat, small as a rat, had been nervously whipping its tail from side to side and meowing plaintively; but, as the lever swung over, there came a change. The vacuum tubes behind the switchboard glowed green; a bright white ray poured from the spray in the chamber, making the metal plate below a shimmering, almost molten thing. The animal's legs suddenly braced on it; its narrowed eyes widened, glazing weirdly, while the tail became a stiff, bristling ramrod. And, as a balloon swells from a strong breath, the cat's body increased in size. It grew not in spurts, but with a smooth, flowing rhythm: grew as easily as a flower unfolding beneath the sun.

In only a few seconds its original size was attained. Howard raised his hand; the lever shot back and the

white beam faded into nothingness. A full sized and very angry cat tore around the inside of the chamber.

"Normal?" Hagendorff questioned. The other nodded and prepared to open the door.

"Wait! She always was a little undersized; I give her a few inches more as a reward."

"Not too much," warned Garth. "She's got a nasty temper; we don't want a wildcat prowling round here!"

The white beam flashed, the tubes glowed and almost instantly flickered off again. When the chamber's door was opened, an indignant and slightly oversized cat bounded through, leaped from the table with a squawled oath of hatred and streaked into the front room of the cabin.

Garth turned and faced Hagendorff, a smile on his lips and a gleam in his eyes. He ran his fingers through his black hair.

"Well," he said, "now it's time for the final experiment. Who shall it be?"

Hagendorff did not answer at once, and the American went on:

"I think it'd better be me. There's a slight risk, of course, and I, as the inventor, could never ask an assistant to do anything I wouldn't. Is it all right with you?"

Hagendorff nodded quickly in answer. Garth stood reflecting for a moment.

"Guinea pigs, rabbits and insects have survived reduction to one-twentieth normal size," he said slowly. "It should be safe for the human body to descend just as far. But stop me at about two feet this first time. I'm not taking any chances; I want to be alive and kicking when I announce the success of my experiments to the scientific world."

His assistant said nothing.

"Well, here goes," Garth added. "I'd better take off my clothes if I don't want to be buried in them. They're not affected by the process. Must be because of the lack of organic connection between their fibers and the human body."

A few minutes later, nude, he jumped onto the laboratory table. He presented a perfect specimen of well-developed manhood as he stood before the door of the chamber. His smooth skin, under which the rounded muscles rolled easily, gleamed white beneath the glare of the floodlight. His gray eyes glanced at the stolid assistant, who already had one hand on the switchboard's lever. Garth saw that the hand was trembling slightly, and smiled as he realized Hagendorff was as excited as he. He said:

"I'll leave the door ajar, so you can more easily watch every phase of the reduction. If it's painful—well, I guess I can stand anything a cat can!"

Then, stooping slightly, Garth stepped in and drew the door almost shut.

e relaxed as much as possible from the tremendous excitement that filled him, and nodded at Hagendorff.

"I'm ready," he said. "Go ahead!"

The ray came to his body as the crash of thunder comes to the ear. His nerves leaped as it struck and enveloped him. He felt as if he were entombed in ice, and yet his veins were aflame. Fiery shafts fanged him all through and resolved, presently, into a measured, tingling beat.

His thoughts raced. He knew that those minute particles of matter, the atoms of his body, were being compacted; he sensed that his legs were rigid, his body stiff, his eyes clamped ahead in a glazed stare. He was only half-conscious of the objects outside, but the dim sight of them was fantastic and nauseous.

There was Hagendorff's face peering in at him—

growing! Swelling as the cat's body had swollen; and yet receding and rising until Garth, momentarily forgetting that he was the one whose size was changing, thought that the man's titanic body would fill the room. But the room was growing, too: the stools were becoming leviathans of wood, the walls were like cliffs, the compact switchboard was a large surface of black, and the chamber in which he stood grew into a high-roofed vault, its sides shooting up and retreating as if shoved by invisible hands.

And still he sank, and still the terrible light devoured him.

Suddenly a delirious sensation engulfed him; his senses went reeling away, and he staggered. Then with a wrench he came to. As he regained control of his mind he knew the lever had been switched off and the process completed.

He found that he was gasping. He passed a hand over his sweat-studded face and looked around.

Outside was the room of a giant. And in a moment a

giant became visible. His vast bulk filled the chamber's doorway; his mammoth face peered in. Garth's eardrums quivered from a deep bass rumble, sounding like thunder on a distant horizon.

"Are you all right, Howard?"

A finger half the length of his own arm reached forward and prodded him. For a second Garth could do nothing but stare at it. It brought home to him starkly the puny size of his body, only two feet in height. He felt suddenly afraid. But that was foolish, he thought; and he laughed, his voice ludicrously high and shrill.

"I'm all right," he cried. "But I can hardly understand you. If I were much smaller, I probably couldn't—your voice'd seem so deep. Gangway, Hagendorff, I'm coming out!"

His eyes were just below the level of the giant's shoulders. He stepped from the black chamber and stared amazedly at the room, at the chairs, the objects in it—at the laboratory table on which he was

standing, along which he might have sprinted thirty yards. A surge of exultant animal spirits flowed through him. His dream had become a reality; the machine had passed its last test! His body was sound and whole; he felt perfectly natural; he had not changed, save in size; and in size he was like Gulliver, confronted with a Brobdingnagian room!

He hurdled a five-inch-high box of tools, ran down the creaking table and stood laughing in front of a rack of test tubes half as high as he was. Three strides took Hagendorff opposite him; and from above the thunderous voice rumbled:

"What were your sensations?"

"Probably as close as man'll ever get to the feelings of a spark of electricity!" the midget replied. "But bearable, though I was freezing and burning at the same time. My body was rigid, paralyzed—just like the animals we used. I couldn't move."

"You're sure you couldn't move? You were helpless?"

The booming voice throbbed with sudden interest. Garth looked up curiously. "No," he repeated. "I couldn't move. But lift me down, Hagendorff. I want to take a walk on the floor."

A hand wrapped around his body, tensed and strained upwards. The two-foot-high man was not quite pulled off the table. Then Hagendorff grunted and relaxed his grasp.

"I had forgotten," he rumbled. "Your weight remains the same. You are one-third my size, yet you weigh almost as much as I do. Weight, which is the sum of the mass of all the atoms in you, is not, naturally, affected by compacting those atoms."

It was only by a great effort that he was able to deposit the manikin on the floor.

For a while Garth strolled around, savoring to their full the fantastic sensations his diminished stature gave him, at once amused and somehow frightened by the overwhelming size of the laboratory. To his eyes, the tables were like bridges; Hagendorff's broad

figure loomed monstrously over him, and the guinea pigs and rabbits in their cages seemed as big as fair-sized dogs. With a grin, he looked up at the giant who was his assistant.

"Think I'll make the return trip, and give you a chance," he said. "I've had my share, and the process has been proven. It's weird, being down in this new world all alone. I'd hate to think what would happen if a rat came along!"

Silently, Hagendorff stooped and grasped him again. But Garth, when he stood once more inside the chamber, regarded his huge, rough-moulded face curiously.

"Say," he said, puzzled, "your hands are trembling like the devil! What's wrong? You're more nervous than I am!"

Hagendorff did not answer. He advanced to the switchboard. His narrowed, deep-set eyes shot a quick glance at the small, nude man inside the chamber, and for a second one hand hovered over the

lever on the panel.

In that tense second a flash of intuition, of deadly fear, came to Garth Howard, and he leaped wildly forward. But his rear foot did not leave the floor of the chamber, and his shout of alarm was choked midway. Again the fierce ray paralyzed every muscle in him, and he was locked motionless where he was.

Helplessly, his glazed eyes stared at Hagendorff, while every moment his rigid little body melted downwards. He was becoming rapidly smaller, not larger!

Through the agony of the stabbing electrical waves, in vain Garth tried to wrench his legs free. The few inches that separated him from the door were an impassable barrier. Sheer panic clutched him. He was trapped. But why? Why had Hagendorff tricked him?

As if reading the question, the giant outside came close to the chamber's door and regarded his captive with eyes that were lit by a peculiar flame. He grunted, then reached backward and returned the

switchboard lever almost to the neutral point, reducing the speed of the decreasing process.

"Yes, that is better," the German gloated, in a deep, satisfied tone. "It will be slower, now. Slower—and more interesting to watch!... I fancy your eyes are reproachful, my friend. Why have I done it, you wonder? Ach! This machine, it will startle the world of science; it will make its inventor famous—not? Yes; and did you think I was going to stand by and see all the credit go to you? No! To me it shall go—me alone! And you—" He chuckled and rubbed his hands before going on.

"You shall be what the newspapers call a martyr to science. You shall sink to a foot, to six inches—to one inch—even less, I think! Eventually the reduction will kill you, of course; and your body shall be proof of how you died—in an experiment—and shall also prove the machine's power and my genius!"

He laughed thunderously, a blond and malevolent titan. He did not notice that, with the lessening of the reduction's speed, a slight trace of control over his

muscles had returned to the midget inside. His tiny body was slowly diminishing, and complete, hopeless paralysis and death was not far away. But Garth was fighting every second, fighting desperately with the trace of strength he possessed to slide to the door, break the contact and get out from under the ray's remorseless influence. Almost imperceptibly, the effort lacerating him with pain, he slid his feet forward. Hagendorff talked on. He seemed to be blinded by the vision of the fame his treachery would bring him.

"We shall have an experiment, my Professor; and then you will have an interesting death! The ray will suck you down; you will crumple and crumple till you're not much bigger than my thumbnail! And then I shall —ah!"

Garth had torn loose. Calling on every ounce of strength and will, the midget, now no more than one foot high, had reached the edge of the floor plate and pitched out onto the long laboratory table.

Giant and dwarf faced each other. For a moment

neither spoke or moved. A breathless tensiity hung over the laboratory. The machine droned on, forgotten. From outside, startlingly near, came the eery hoot of an owl.

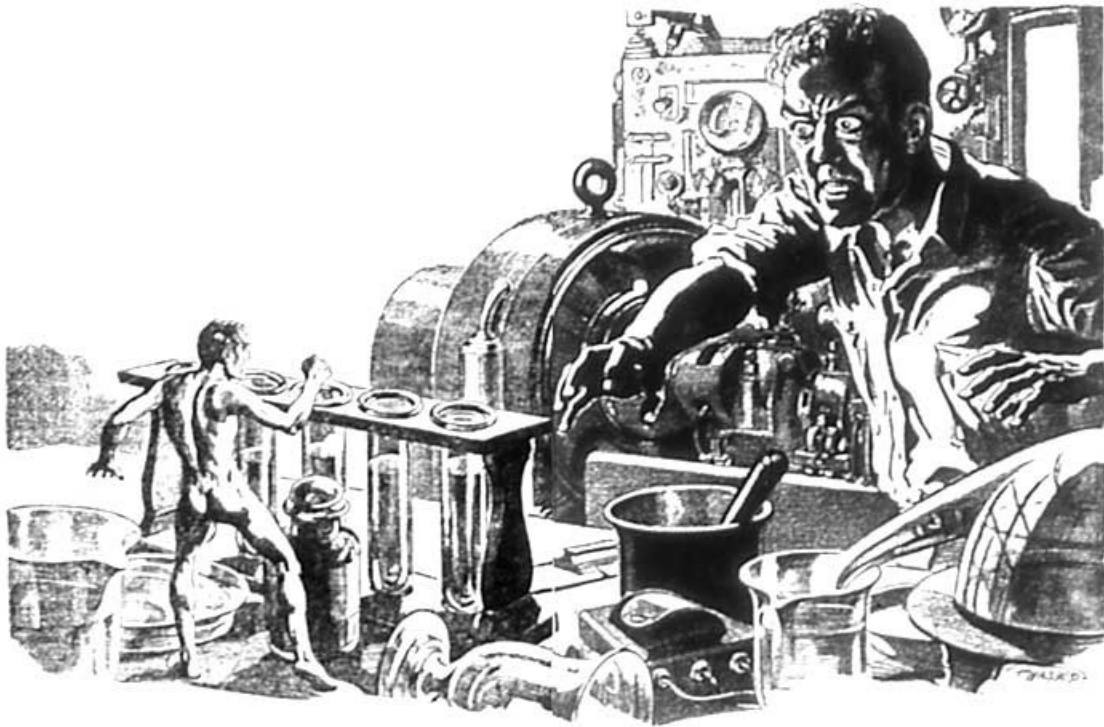
A tight smile broke through the angry surprise on Hagendorff's face. "Well, well!" he said, with gargantuan, macabre humor. "We object! It was foolish, eh, to reduce the power? Next time, it shall not be so. We—object!"

With the word, he lunged, and his bulky arms lashed down in a wide, grasping sweep.

But Garth's taut muscles, retaining all the strength and vigor of their normal size had been awaiting just such a move, and his tiny body described the arc of a tremendous leap that neatly vaulted one huge arm and started him sprinting swiftly down the table.

t the end he wheeled, and before the other overcame his surprise at such a nimble retreat, burst out indignantly:

"For God's sake, Hagendorff, what's come over you? Be sensible! You can't do this; you can't really mean it! Why—"



"So!" roared the assistant, and his rush cut short the midget's shrill, frantic words. But his grasp this time was better judged; Garth felt the great fingers slip over his body. Remembering his strength, he lashed out at one with all his might. Hagendorff grunted with pain; but instead of continuing the attack, he

suddenly turned and strode to the door leading into the other room, and closed it with a bang.

"You cannot escape," he growled, advancing again; "you merely delay."

Panting, Garth glanced around the room. He was, in truth, trapped. There was but the one door; and even if he could reach it, he could not get it open, for the handle would be far above him. The room was a sealed arena. For a little while it would go on—a wild leaping and dodging on the table, a hopeless evading of mammoth hands ... and then, inevitably, would come a crushing grip on his body, followed by experimentation and the agony of death in the black chamber.

Fearful, he waited, a perfect, living statuette, twelve inches high....

A grunt preluded the giant's vicious charge. The American staggered from the brush of a sweeping hand; then, twisting mightily, he dove under it, like a mouse slipping under the paw of a cat. In doing so he

fell sprawling; and though he was up in a moment, his arm was held. A hoarse, exultant rumble came to his ears.

"Caught, my friend!"

But Hagendorff spoke too soon. With a great wrench, Garth broke free, and made a tigerish dash back along the table toward the window. And even as the clumsy titan jumped to the side and grabbed again at him, he hurled his tiny, heavy body against the pane, and went plunging through a shower of glass into the cool dark night outside.

He fell five feet, and the wind was jarred out of him as he crashed through the branches of a bush under the window into the sodden earth beneath. Unhurt, save for a few lacerations from the glass, he staggered to his feet, gasping for his breath, and started to run across the clearing towards the fringe of dense forest growth that ringed the cabin.

Then he heard thunderous footsteps and, a second later, the sound of the front door being pulled open.

Garth turned in his tracks, and stumbled back beneath the cabin, thanking heaven that it was raised on short stilts. But the ruse did not give him much of a start, and by the time he had painfully threaded his way between the piles of timber left underneath the cabin, Hagendorff had discovered the trick and was scouting back.

Then, with the strength of the hunted, Garth was out from under the other side and sprinting for the doubtful sanctuary of the forest.

His tiny feet, carrying the weight of a normal-sized man, sank ankle high into the muddy ground, several times almost tripping him. Even as he got to where a trail through the bush began, and passed from the cold starlight into spaces black with clustered shadows, he heard a bellow from behind, and, glancing back, saw a monstrous shape come leaping on his tracks.

He had only seconds in which to find refuge; he could not stick to the trail. Thick bush, dank and heavy from recent rains, was on either side, fugitive streaks of

pale light from above painting it eerily. Garth plunged into the matted growth, dropped to hands and knees and wormed forward away from the trail. Earth-jarring footbeats sounded close. With frantic haste he wrenched through the scratching tendrils and came to a miniature clearing.

He saw the tilted shape of a rotted tree-stump, its roots half washed away and exposing a narrow crevice between them. Gasping, the nude, foot-high figure tumbled down into it, and lay there, trying to hush his labored breathing.

He was a mere twenty feet from the trail; and though to him the bush was a jungle, to his pursuer it was only chest-high. A towering shadow moved along the trail. The thud of heavy footbeats came more slowly to the listening midget. Hagendorff was searching, puzzled by the vague shadows, for where Garth had left the path.

Silence fell.

Garth's heart was pounding like a trip-hammer. He

held himself alert, ready, if need be, to struggle up from the moist crevice and dart on further into the bush. He could not see the giant, but could picture his huge, sullen face all too clearly. Still no sound came. Risking all, he gripped a root and hauled himself up slightly. Then he peered around the stump.

Hagendorff was standing in the thick of the bush. He was not ten feet away, striving in the gloom to discern the other's tell-tale tracks. Garth drew his head back, hardly daring to breathe. Shivering, his naked body miserably cold, he waited, pressed down in the soggy earth. His betraying tracks were there; the shadows alone befriended him.

The silence was drawn so fine that the faint cheep of a night-bird sounded startlingly loud. But then came thunder that sent the bird winging away in fright, and the night and the forest echoed with the roar of a wrathful, impatient human voice.

"You hear me, wherever you are! And hear this: I leave you now, but in ten minutes I have you! You little fool—you think you can get free? It is only by

minutes you delay me!"

Snarling a curse, the treacherous giant turned and crashed through the bush and took his huge form striding back towards the cabin.

Garth was thinking of many things as he scrambled back wearily from his refuge to the trail. He was cursing the unwanted publicity which prying reporters had given his work in Detroit, and which had led him to lease the lonely island and build a laboratory in the wilderness. Had it not been for that publicity, he would never have needed an assistant, and the vision of fame would never have come to delude Hagendorff and turn his thoughts towards murder.

His position seemed a horrible delirium from which he must presently awake. Naked, dwarfed by each ordinary forest weed, unarmed, and trembling from the wind-sharpened night, he hardly knew which way to turn. His body was blotched with blood and mud, and under it the ragged gashes made by glass and bush stung painfully; he was hungry and stiff and

tired and miserable. He remembered Hagendorff's threat of capturing him in ten minutes, and forced a smile to his face.

"Looks kind of bad," he muttered, using his voice in an attempt to dispel some of the lonely grip of the night, "but we'll keep moving, anyway! He's coming back soon. Let's see: I'd better make for the stream. It'll be hard for him to follow my tracks through that. And then...."

Then—what? The island was small. He realized he could not stand many hours of exposure. Inevitably—But he turned his mind from the future and its seeming hopelessness, and concentrated on the immediate need, which was to hide himself. Forcing the pace, he struck off on a shambling trot down the dim trail, on into the deepening, sinister shadows towards the island's lone stream.

Obstacles that normally he would not have noticed made his path tortuous. His great weight sank his feet ankle-high in the moist, uneven ground. Time and time again he stumbled over some imbedded rock

that, potato-sized, was like a boulder to him. Time and time again he fell, and when he rose his legs were plastered with soggy earth that did not dry; and the damp, fallen leaves and twigs he pitched into clung to his coating of mud. Each broken limb and branch, dropped from the whispering gloom of the trees above, drained the energy from his tiring muscles. Soon he was conscious of a vague numbness creeping over him, a deceptive, drowsy warmth into which he longed to sink, but which he drove back by working his arms and legs as vigorously as he could.

On he went, with teeth clenched and eyes fixed on the half-seen trail ahead—a fantastic, tiny creature hunted like a wild animal by a giant of his own kind!

Presently, through the shroud of darkness traced by ghostly slivers of starlight, came the sound of trickling water. The trail rose, dipped down; and through that hollow crawled the stream, winding from a hidden spring to the encompassing river below. Garth was winded when he came to it; to his eyes it seemed a small river. His legs were so numb they hardly felt the cold bite of the water that lapped

around them.

Some furry water animal leaped away as Garth trudged upstream, alarmed by the strange midnight visitant and the self-encouraging mutterings of a shrill human voice....

He had waded what seemed to him a weary distance—in reality only a few hundred yards—through the winding, icy creek, when suddenly he halted and stood stock-still. Listening, he heard the ordinary sounds of the wind through the fir-spires, and the slow trickle of water; heard the beating of his own heart. Nothing else. And yet.... He took another step.

Then he swung quickly around and peered back, senses alert. There was no mistaking the sound that had come again. It was the crunch of heavy feet, thudding at even intervals on damp earth. They were Hagendorff's; and he was armed with light!

A long beam of white speared through the tangle of bush and tree trunks far below. It came slanting down from above, prying for the story recorded by

miniature footprints in the ground. By its distance from him, Garth could tell Hagendorff had come to where his trail led into the stream. The ray held steady for minutes. Again it prowled nervously around, hunting for tell-tale signs, sweeping in widening circles. Then, it was punctuated by the crunch of a boot.

The giant was following upstream!

With the flashlight, he might even be able to trace the prints in the bed of the creek. Stooping, Garth crept ahead, as silently as he could, though the stir of water at his feet seemed terribly loud. There were keen ears behind, craned for sounds like that. He knew he would have to hide again—quickly—and at that moment he saw a place.

A cleft in the bank to his right held a small hole, dimly limned by a wisp of starlight. On hands and feet the midget scrambled cat-like to it. It slanted down and inwards, only inches wide, so that the earth was close to his body when he slid feet-first inside. But it was warm and dry, for it was shielded by a ledge from

rain, and with the warmth the hunted manikin's spirits rose somewhat. The ray of light, which he could see sweeping back and forth downstream, was still following slowly, as if Hagendorff were having trouble making out the water-covered trail. Garth breathed easier, cuddled down—and then, for some unaccountable reason, he felt uneasy.

He had not noticed it at first, but now his nostrils were filled with a queer, musky odor that electrified his nerves and tensed his muscles. He felt the short hairs on his neck rise; felt his lips tighten and draw back over clenched teeth. Some long-buried instinct was warning him of danger—and suddenly he sprang from the hole and swung around.

From it, a killer came snaking out, its bared fangs thirsty for his life blood!

Arching and swaying its lithe-muscled body, it slid forward in its graceful, savage way—a weasel, the deadliest pound-for-pound killer that prowls the forest. It was as long as the naked human who faced it was tall. Unwittingly, he had chosen its hole as a

refuge.

Retreat would have been impossible, but Garth for some reason did not even think of it. A strange new sensation poured through his tense body, a sensation akin to fierce joy. Gone was his tiredness; his teeth too were bared, matching the wicked fangs before him. Two primal creatures they were, tooth to tooth and claw to claw, the man as naked and intoxicated with the blood lust as the ten pounds of bone and sinew that now darted suddenly for his throat.

With the lightning quickness that had come to him with small size, Garth stepped aside. And as the weasel's head streaked by he called on man's distinctive weapon, and put every ounce of his weight behind a right arm swing that landed square on a cold black nose and doubled the weasel back in midair.

Stunned, it writhed for a second on the slippery bank; and then again it was up, mad with pain now and swaying slightly as it gathered for a second leap against this creature that fought so strangely.

But in the momentary respite Garth had reasoned out his best chance. He did not try to fight off the second dart with his fists, but went boldly in. Ducking through the needle claws with head lowered, his tiny hands streaked in on the furry throat. He found it, and his fingers thumbed into the wind-pipe; but not before the weasel smelled the blood its claws had drawn and went utterly berserk. For a moment there was a wild flurry of furry, tearing legs and a blood-streaked white body between them, trying desperately to evade their slicing strokes. They pitched down the bank together, animal and man struggling silently to the death; and when they jarred to a stop in the water below, Garth's strategy was achieved.

He was uppermost; his grip was steel around the throbbing throat, and the hundred and eighty pound weight of his body was holding the legs powerless. Not an inch from his face the weasel's fangs clashed frantically together. Garth maintained his clutch, squeezing with every bit of his mighty strength. The animal shuddered; then writhed in the death

convulsions; at last lay still.

Panting, his mind a welter of primate emotions roused by the kill, the man shook it a last time, jumped to his feet and glared around—to see the beam of a flashlight only a dozen yards away. His more deadly foe, the human foe, was upon him. Perhaps the sounds of the fight had reached his ears.

Garth lost not a moment. Quickly he slung the weasel's body back into the hole and jammed himself down after it.

Hagendorff approached slowly, mumbling and cursing to himself in sullen ill-humor. Things were not going as he had expected them to. The white ray scoured the banks of the stream, searching doggedly. Nearer he came, and with each step the watching midget's rapid breathing grew tighter. The towering body was more than shadow now. Another ten feet and the flashlight would find the marks of the fight.

But the titan's patience gave out. Closer than he had yet been to his quarry, he paused, and again the

thunder of his voice broke the night's hush.

"Bah! This is foolish! In daylight I find him certainly. I have waited long; I can wait a little more. I need sleep. To-morrow, it will be different!"

He swung away from the stream, and in a few minutes the rip and crash of his progress through the bush had died. In the silence, Garth Howard considered his situation.

He faced it squarely, as was his custom. He did not brood over the treachery of his assistant, or of how unfairly and suddenly it had plunged him into peril and robbed him of his normal body. He accepted his position and searched for possible angles of escape. There were not many hours left in which to make a decisive move. The island was small, and, as Hagendorff had said, discovery would be inevitable in daytime.

Garth thought of the machine, and of the giant sleeping. A desperate plan came to him, and his jaws set decisively. "I'll do it!" he exclaimed aloud.

The lever which controlled both increase and decrease could be worked from inside the chamber if he rigged up a system of turning it with a wire or rope. If he pulled it to the increase only part way, he would, he knew, have sufficient power over his muscles to pull it back off, or slide again from the chamber, as he had done before. Whether or not he could do this depended on Hagendorff's being asleep. Possibly he could be locked in the living room, if he were there. Or tied. The increase, even at half speed, would only take about forty seconds. Once back to his size there would be a fight without odds, Garth thought grimly.

It was a big risk, and there was probably only a small chance of succeeding, but it meant getting back to six feet, back to a normal world, back to equal terms. That was the magnet which drew him presently toward the cabin laboratory.

He went slowly, to allow Hagendorff plenty of time to fall soundly asleep. The giant, as he had said, needed sleep—needed it badly—for, like Garth Howard, he had done without it for forty-eight hours under the

excitement of imminent success in their work. Garth considered that his move would be totally unexpected, being made right into the other's territory. There was a chance.

And so, cold and weariness banished by thoughts of the goal ahead, he prowled back along the trail like any small creature of the forest.

It was half an hour later when he came in sight of the cabin. His heart drummed excitedly as he stood in the shadows surveying it. He wondered if Hagendorff was still awake; if he was, perhaps, waiting for him. Certainly he did not seem to be: the cabin was dark and silent, and the only door was tightly closed. Still—it might be wiser to retreat while still free....

"No, by heaven!" Garth Howard exclaimed in his thoughts. "I'm going through with it!" Stooping slightly, he left the shadows and ran boldly into the starlight.

He half expected to hear a scuffle of feet and see the giant come leaping out at him; but nothing broke the

silence. He made his careful way along the side of the cabin to the place where a trough for waste liquids led through a small hole at the level of the floor, and with great care wormed through.

As he started to cautiously reconnoiter, he was suddenly arrested in his tracks. He had caught the sound of deep, rhythmic breathing. Hagendorff was asleep, not in the adjoining living room—but in the laboratory!

For a moment, Garth did not know what to do. Caution urged him to retreat; but that would not get him back to his size. On tip-toe, he explored around. The boards squeaked beneath his great weight, but the nearby breathing beyond continued in regular rhythm.

His eyes were toned to the darkness of the laboratory; he saw the chamber of his atom-compacting machine, its outer sides ghostly in the faint, reflected starlight, and stared at it with a pang of fierce longing. So near, it was—so very near! Holding the stolen size of his body; holding all that was vital to him; holding life

itself—it rested there silently, within reach of a few steps and a quick climb up one of the table legs. So he thought, his brain whirling with mingled emotions, his tiny body shivering and aching with cold and its many hurts. The machine was near—but a barrier blocked the way.

Hagendorff's bulk lay outstretched on a side table, black in the shadows, and from him came the level breathing of a sound sleeper, climaxed now and again by a rumbling snore. He was taking no chances; his presence there seemed to destroy any hope of the midget's regaining normal size. But Garth was desperate, and for a minute or so he considered.

Forty seconds, the increase would take, at half speed. It might be that long before the giant would waken thoroughly and see what was happening. He, Garth, might start the process, and, when he saw the huge figure stirring and waking from the noise of the dynamo, switch off the ray and get out. No matter how short a time it took Hagendorff to throw off the foggiest of his sleep, he would be somewhat increased in size, and the odds of combat would not

be so great.

It was a terrible risk. Did he dare take it? He thought of the forest, of the raw night, of what was threatened in the morning.... Yes!

Silently, the manikin clasped the nearest table leg, shinnied up and hauled himself over the top. As he got there his heart leaped. A sharp thumping had come from behind. He dropped to his knees and glanced round; but he immediately rose again, reassured. It was only the rabbits in their cage, disturbed by the strange figure on the table. He thanked God that they—and his tarantulas and other insects—could make no alarming noises.

Garth found a long strand of wire. The panel's control lever, swung to the left, controlled increase; to the right, decrease. Garth's plan was to wind the middle of the wire around it, relay each end around the two supporting posts of the switchboard, and thus have both ends of the wire in his hands when he stood inside the chamber. One end of the wire would enable him to pull the lever over for increase, and the other

to pull it back to neutral when the increase was completed, or when Hagendorff arose.

Quickly he started to arrange the wire. Then suddenly his hands dropped and he stared dismayed at the control panel.

The power switch had been removed!

It was Hagendorff's work, of course. He had guarded every angle. Without that switch, the mechanism was lifeless and literally powerless. It worked on a delicately adjusted and enclosed rheostat; there was nothing that could be substituted for it. It would take hours to improvise one in the heart of the apparatus.

The switch, Garth reflected bitterly, was probably concealed somewhere about the giant's body.

He considered the possibility of tying him. He knew where there was a coil of light, pliable wire on the floor; he might be able to loop it over the giant's hands and legs while he slept, tie him securely, and then go through his pockets for the switch. Another

hazard! But there was nothing else to do.

Garth lowered himself over the table's edge and slid quietly down the leg. He glanced at the sleeping man, then over across the room to where, beneath another table, the wire was—and his nerves jumped at what he saw there.

From the darkness under the table two spots of greenish fire, close to the floor, held steadily on him.

As he stared, they vanished, to reappear more to the right. With the movement, he glimpsed the outline of a lithe, crouching animal, and knew it to be the cat he and Hagendorff had experimented on earlier that night. It was stalking him in the deliberate manner of its kind!

It came edging around, so as to leap on him from the side. He knew that he represented fair prey to it; that if he tried to run, it would pounce on him from behind. Wearily he tensed his miniature body, standing poised on the balls of his feet and never dropping his eyes for a moment. He could not repress

a grim smile at the ludicrousness of being attacked by an ordinary house-cat, even though it was tiger-sized to him. Though his victory over the weasel, a far deadlier fighter, made him confident he could dispatch it, there was another aspect to the approaching struggle. It would have to be fought in silence. Not four feet away, Hagendorff slept. There lay the overwhelming danger.

Even as these things flashed through his brain, the cat steadily inched nearer on its padded paws. Ghostly starlight framed it now; Garth could see the eager, quivering muscles, the long tail, flat behind, twitching slightly, the rigid, unstirring head and the slowly contracting paws. The terrible suspense of its stalking scraped his nerves. There would be a long pause, then an almost imperceptible hunching forward, with the tail ever twitching; then the same thing again, and over again. It became unbearable. Garth deliberately invited the attack.

He pretended to turn and run, his back towards it. At once he sensed its tensing body, its bunching muscles—then knew that it had sprung.

Whirling, he had a fleeting impression of a supple body in midair, of bristling claws and bared, needlepoint fangs. But he was ready. The weasel had taught him his best weapon, the great weight of his body. He streaked in beneath the wide-spread paws, shot his hands into the fur of the throat and threw himself against the shock of the animal's suddenly arrested leap.

There was no standing his weight. Over the cat went, its back thudding into the floor, its claws held powerless by the hundred and eighty pounds of hard flesh that straddled it.

The fall had made little noise; but, as Garth tightened the grip of his fingers and bored inward, a dull, steady thumping began to sound. It was the cat's tail, pounding on the floor!

Desperately he tried to hook a leg over it, but could not reach far enough. It beat like a tom-tom. From above, there came the sound of a huge frame stirring, and the rumble of a sleepy grunt.

In a moment, the titan would be thoroughly awake.

By the drumming tail alone, Garth realized, his chance of regaining full size was sent glimmering. There was nothing but retreat, now, and a hasty one, if he valued life. Another noise came from the waking Hagendorff. He was sitting up, staring around. Garth jumped to his feet, threw the cat's twitching body beneath the table, and dodged at full speed for the hole whereby he had entered.

Like a mouse he wriggled through, leaped to the ground, scrambled up and made for the forest. He ran with all the speed at his command, and was almost surprised when he reached the black fringe of the forest in safety. In the protecting gloom, he dared to pause and look back.

Hagendorff was not pursuing him. From the sound, he was merely boarding shut the drain hole, to prevent another entrance in that way; then, afterwards, the windows.

Garth was puzzled. "I don't understand it," he said

aloud. "Why is he so sure he can get me in the morning? Isn't he afraid I'll leave the island? Why I've got to try to get away, now. It would be death to be here after the dawn!"

He stood there making his plans. They had a rowboat below, powered with an outboard motor. Even in his present size, he might possibly run it, if he could get it started. He would strike down-river for Detroit, and when the gas gave out, the current would carry him on. Some river boat might pick him up and carry him to friends in the city. His grotesquely dwarfed body would prove his story, and they would bring him back and end Hagendorff's mad dream of fame, and help him to regain his normal size. He could superintend the construction of another machine if the present one was wrecked.

When he started down the trail to the river, he seemed to be walking through a haze. He felt curiously light-headed, and his body was completely numb. The long exposure was telling on him, and there was much more of it to come. He wondered if he could hold out until he reached the mainland.

But his mind cleared of the daze the cold and near-exhaustion had brought it to when at last he came to the beach and realized that again Hagendorff had anticipated him. The rowboat was gone! No wonder the giant could afford to wait until daylight.

Garth floundered down to the beach and ran to where the craft usually lay. There was only a groove in the rough, pebbly surface, a groove left by the boat's keel. He followed it up the bank, and twenty yards in found the dinghy chained and locked firmly to a large tree.

The midget's face grew suddenly very haggard as he stood there, staring at what looked like his death sentence. He should have known Hagendorff would secure the boat, he told himself bitterly. It was a cruel blow, and sheer misery of mind and body gripped him as he turned and peered through the darkness of wind-whipped water and sky toward a horizon that was already lightening. Down-river lay Detroit, a friendly, everyday world. It was not far in miles, but it seemed lost to him forever....

Garth took his eyes from that prospect with a wry twist to his mouth. It chanced that they fell on the painter of the rowboat.

It was a stout Manila cord, some twenty feet in length, and tied tightly to a ring in the bow of the boat. He looked at it dully for a full minute before the idea came to him. Then suddenly the lethargy bred of hopelessness left him. Garth remembered a pocket knife he had left in the boat the day before. He climbed over the side and began to fumble about in the darkness. First he came upon a torn handkerchief which he hastily tied about his loins. Further probing disclosed the knife wedged under a seat in the boat. When he had finally extricated it, he threw the knife over the side and climbed out.

After some minutes of frantic cutting and hacking he severed the rope, and, quickly taking up one of the ends, ran with it further along the bank.

There was still a way of getting off the island. A cold and risky way, but better than waiting miserably for capture. On the bank was a pile of sawn logs,

intended for firewood; and a strong rope was in his hands. Much indeed could be done now.

The making of his raft proved a herculean task, a racking and almost impossible one for a man limited by doll-sized hands and a foot-high body. First the logs had to be rolled to the water's edge, six of them. Each was as thick as he was tall, and this first part of his task took him a precious half hour, every minute of which brought nearer the dawn. Ripples like ordinary waves washed up the struggling manikin and left him gasping as he stood braced in the cold water and tugged one log after another out and wound the rope under and over it. The raft had to be built in water; he would never have been able to drag the whole thing off the beach.

When at last he wearily tied the rope end to the last log, and stuck his knife handy in it, the clouds on the horizon were flushed by the coming sun. But his means of escape was completed; and hanging on the end, he shoved the raft out into the river. Right then he almost lost his life. For when his feet left the sloping bottom, his great weight, out of all proportion

to the size of his body, pulled him under, and it was only by virtue of a desperate clutch on the raft that he escaped drowning. Thrashing furiously, he struggled up from the water, and lay, totally blown, on the logs. It was then he first realized that his chance of life was no stronger than the rope which held them together. For swimming was out of the question, and one or two logs would never support his hundred and eighty pounds.

The end which he lay on was well under water, and the waves splashed up between the bobbing logs. The current he was headed for swept down fifty yards offshore, which was a sixth of a mile to the little legs now thrust out behind and making a rhythmic flutter.

He was off the island! Freedom and life were near! Though his teeth were chattering, his fingers crushed by the jarring logs, and his body utterly wretched, he grinned with joy as the stretch between him and the gloomy mass of the island slowly widened.

Then came the sun. The skies faded from gray into a delicate, cloud-flecked blue; slowly the air warmed,

and the surface of the water seemed to calm under it. Though the sun was good on his body, Garth realized night was more friendly to him, for in the growing light his craft was all too conspicuous to the giant who would presently be following his tracks down to the beach. He chided himself for not having thought of camouflaging the raft with leafy branches. Doggedly, he forced it out.

When at last he felt the pull of the current, he ceased his weary kicking and glanced up into the swiftly advancing dawn. There was a bird soaring through the keen air up there, gliding in easy circles with almost motionless wings. Garth gazed at it somewhat wistfully, envying its freedom and power of flight. And then he shut his eyes. He was very tired....

He must have dozed off for a moment, for he awoke to find himself slipping off. With a sudden jerk he regained his position—and that was what saved his life at that moment. For without warning, while he was nodding, plumed death struck from the skies.

It dropped like a plummet, as was its manner. It had

been circling above and judging its swoop, and by rights its curved talons should have arched deep into the unguarded back of the naked figure on the raft. But at the last second the figure moved aside—too late for the hawk to alter its swoop.

The raft rocked under the impact; for a moment Garth Howard, dazed by the sudden attack, did not know what had happened. Huge scratching wings were thrashing about him; his left arm stung from where a claw had raked it; and he wrenched around to stare into two wicked slits of eyes behind a fierce, rounded beak that jabbed at him.

Evidently he represented easy prey to the hawk, for it did not soar away, but instead came at him again in a flurry of beating wings and stabbing beak, a vicious, feathered fighter from above. Caught off guard by the suddenness and savagery of the onslaught, Garth retreated stumblingly, forgetting his weight and the size of the raft and defending himself with his arms as best he could against the rushes of the hawk. The raft tilted perilously; water washed around his legs and he slipped and went under.

He felt his fingers slipping inexorably over the edge of the log he had gripped; his legs threshed up a welter of foam, but he kept going down. Panic clutched him; his weight would sink him like a stone. But suddenly his clutching hand was gripped by steel-like talons, and through the water he caught a glimpse of the hawk straining backwards with mighty sweeps of its wings in an effort to lift him bodily into the air.

His size had deceived it. It could not hoist him, but did manage to drag his head and chest out of the water. That was enough. With an effort, Garth scrambled onto the raft.

The hawk, probably greatly surprised by its failure to soar away with such tiny prey, tore into him again, raking his body painfully. Hardly knowing what he did, Garth grabbed out as it hovered over him and succeeded in wrapping his fingers around one of its legs. Then, bracing himself as best he could, and ignoring the scratching wings and piercing beak, he gave the leg a sharp twist and heard the crack of breaking bone.

He was only half-conscious of the hawk's shrill scream of pain, of its swift retreat into the blue, with the broken leg dangling grotesquely. For only a moment he was aware that he had driven it off; then the pain of his wounds and his utter exhaustion swept up over him, and he flopped down on the raft in a dead faint....

For a long time Garth was dimly aware of familiar noises. At first they were faint and scarcely perceptible; but, as his senses slowly began to return, disturbing thoughts came to him. He felt that he was on his back, and confined, and when he twisted, to turn over, he found he could not. He opened his eyes and blinked.

He was back in the laboratory—lying bound, hand and foot, on the long table.

The giant Hagendorff appeared over him, and his deep voice rumbled:

"Badly scarred and bruised, my little friend! Cats you have fought, and birds, and each has left its mark. It

was useless to run away last night—not?"

Garth was suddenly too full of a weary resignation to even think of speaking. Remonstrance, he knew, would avail him nothing. The long struggle for freedom and life was over, and he had lost.

The assistant was apparently in good humor. He went on:

"Really, it is too bad, after that magnificent fight of yours! A hawk—was it not? I was following your tracks, and had just reached the beach when I see a great fuss on the water. A raft, I see! A bird, attacking something on it! A little white figure, struggling! Well, it is that easy. I unlock the boat and go to the raft and find my elusive friend there, unconscious. So I bring him back here. He has forgotten: we have an experiment to complete."

There was a fire of exultation in the man's eyes as they glared down at the midget who lay on the laboratory table, just a few feet away from the chamber of the machine. He reached out and ran a

thick finger over his victim's body.

"You do not deserve this," he said. "I should kill you outright—but, graciously, I give you death in the machine. Yours will be the first human body to be reduced to an inch; maybe less. This is your martyrdom; for this, your name will live, along with mine, for having perfected the process."

Garth Howard saw that the window was boarded tightly shut. Then Hagendorff caught his eyes as, with a grin, he plunged a hand into a pocket and drew forth the missing panel switch. He dangled it in front of Garth.

"What you would have given for this last night, eh? With your wire to pull the lever so carefully arranged! Ach, it was too bad!" He shrugged, then picked up a screwdriver and turned to fix the switch on the control panel.

The moment his back was turned, Garth gazed frantically around. The fantastic fate he had striven so desperately to stave off was very close now. What

could he do?

Some tools lay on the table, just out of his reach, among them a pair of cutting pliers. He stared at the pliers—an overgrown tool, half as long as his own body. The twist of Hagendorff's wrist driving home the first screw brought a cold chill over him. The pliers! It was a chance!

He twisted a little, and keeping his eyes on the giant's back, he inched toward them. His hands, tied at the wrists behind him, clutched for them; found them. The jaws were open, and there were two sharp cutting edges. He could not hope to manipulate the whole implement with his bound hands, but he located one edge, painfully brought the rope to it and sawed rapidly.

The steel sliced his flesh, and he felt the warm stickiness of blood. But he disregarded this and kept on. Hagendorff was still working, all unconscious—but the last screw was going in. And then some strands of the rope snapped, and it loosened.

The next second, Garth had wrenched his hands free.

Then, throwing caution to the winds, he sat up, grabbed the great tool and sliced the rope at his feet.

At that moment, Hagendorff finished his job and turned around.

Their eyes met. For a breathless instant nothing happened, save that the smile on the titan's face changed to surprise and then fury. Garth scrambled to his feet. The movement brought a bellow of rage, and the manikin saw two enormous hands converging on him in a sweep that bade fair to crush every bone in his dwarfed body.

Leaping backwards instinctively, he hurled the pliers at the giant's head.

They were well aimed, and he saw them strike the temple, stopping the man in his tracks. He thundered, more from anger than pain. His heart pounding wildly, Garth ran back to a position behind a rack of test tubes. It was from there that he saw Hagendorff,

cursing crazily, grab up a machinist's hammer and advance upon him.

All sanity had apparently left the giant. His great face was flushed and distorted, and a growing welt showed where the pliers had clipped him. Garth suddenly knew that if he were captured again, death would not come in the chamber, but from those powerful hands, or the weapon they clutched.

The hammer swung back for a crushing blow. But in the instant it hung poised, Garth lifted a half-filled test tube from the rack before him and swished its contents forward.

The tube held sulphuric acid, and it sprayed over Hagendorff's face. The hammer pitched from his hand; he clutched at his eyes and stumbled back, shrieking in agony.

Garth at once ran to the edge of the table, swung himself over and slid down the leg to the floor. The laboratory door was open and he dashed for it. But, whether or not Hagendorff could see his frantic

retreat, he anticipated it, and with a reeling plunge he got there first. Fumbling, he found the key in the hole and turned it. The room was sealed.

Beginning then, the blind Hagendorff was a man berserk. With a sobbing roar of pain and fury, he lashed round for the foot-high figure that dodged and wheeled and zig-zagged to keep from his threshing arms and his hands. A table crashed over, and a flood of chemicals mixed and boiled on the floor; then another, as the giant blundered blindly into it. The cages of animals split open, and guinea pigs, rabbits and insects scuttled from their prisons, fleeing to the corners from the wild plunges of the raging German.

Garth went reeling from a glancing blow, and fell against an over-turned stool under a far table where he could hardly breathe for the mixed odors of spilt chemicals. By some sixth sense, Hagendorff seemed to locate him, for his huge body turned and came directly for him.

But Garth did not wait. Seizing the stool he whirled it so that it slid smash into the giant's legs. The man

pitched over with a grunt, striking the floor so hard that the planks shivered.

He did not rise. He lay there, in a wreckage of glass and splintered wood and stinking chemicals, moaning slightly.

Garth wasted no time, but gripped a leg of the laboratory table, shinned to the top and with frantic speed fixed his strand of wire onto the control lever and round the supporting posts of the instrument panel. Then he jumped for the dynamo switch, caught the handle and jerked it down.

The drone of a generator surged through the room. Then the midget was standing in the chamber, both ends of the wire in his hands; and his heart was thudding madly as he pulled one of them.

It held. Over came the lever, halfway. The brilliant stream of the ray poured down. Dimly the manikin glimpsed the chamber's walls sinking down, the wreckage-strewn room outside diminishing to normal size. Fiery pain throbbed through him, but it was lost

in the exultation that filled his mind as the seconds went by. He grew to two feet, two and a half—three.

But beyond that he was not to go. The swaying shape of Hagendorff loomed outside the cube. Aroused by the drone of the generator and what it signified, the giant had floundered up from the floor and now came clutching blindly for him.

Garth knew he would have to leave the chamber at once; so, struggling for command of his muscles through the paralysis that numbed them, he tensed his hold on the other wire and pulled it a little. The control lever swung back to neutral; the ray faded and Garth jumped out. He was only a few feet away from the huge convulsed face as the German roared:

"By God, you'll never get back on this machine!"

His purpose was plain; his groping hand had already found the control lever. To prevent his ripping it out, Garth plunged head first into Hagendorff's stomach, and they both went down in a flurry of arms and legs. Garth, scrambling to get loose, was conscious of the

ray pouring down again in the chamber above. The lever had not been wrenched out, but jerked over, setting the process of increase on.

The next few minutes were a chaos. Now that Howard was three feet tall he was without some of the advantages of his former smallness and compactness, and his utmost efforts failed to free him from the death clutch of the pain-maddened giant. Over and over they rolled on the floor. Garth trying only to break free, and the other relentlessly holding on and dragging him over to the chamber again.

It was a losing fight for the diminutive one, weakened as he was by his exposure and the fierce fights he had had. Little by little, squirming and resisting with all his remaining strength, he was brought near—to see the German, at last, pull half the reducing apparatus with a crash to the floor.

The ray in the chamber faded off. The machine was silenced forever, so that Garth could never hope to regain his full size in this one....

With the realization of this, most of his spirit went, while the savage giant, successful in smashing the machinery, now turned and devoted himself exclusively to his victim.

"Now for you!" he roared in frightening triumph, clutching the smaller man's neck with his great hands and bearing him to the floor.

Against those fingers gouged into his wind-pipe like a vise of steel, Garth could do nothing. Feebly he gagged, and feebly he clawed at the pitiless hands—and futilely.

It was the end, he told himself. He had come close, but closeness did not count. His eyes bulged, and a shroud of black began to obscure his vision.

And then, suddenly, over the giant's flexed arms, he glimpsed, coming from the chamber on the table, something that chilled the blood in his veins with horror.

It was huge and utterly loathsome. Long, hairy legs

folded out, and following them came a furry, bloated body at least five feet thick. Many-faceted eyes fixed themselves coldly on the men on the floor. In one hideous leap the monster soared from the table all the way to the room's ceiling, seeming almost to float as it came down. For a moment it teetered on the floor, not five feet from the giant who, blind and all unconscious of it, was throttling his diminutive victim beneath him.

Garth for a second forgot the grip on his throat in the horror of the monster. He knew at once what it was—a tarantula. It had crawled inside the chamber when its cage was broken, had been there even while he had been there, and had been swollen to its present blood-curdling size while they were fighting and the ray was on. With the smashing of the apparatus, it was free to come out.

It gathered for the final spring, its terrible legs tensing perceptibly—a creature out of a nightmare. Garth Howard tried to shriek out a warning, but Hagendorff was holding his throat too well. He could only struggle weakly and nod toward the horror

beyond; but the message did not get across to the giant.

Then the tarantula sprang again.

For a moment it seemed to hover on Hagendorff's upturned back. When it floated down, its ragged legs cradled over him, and the egg-shaped body squatted on his back....

Garth felt his frayed nerves and senses going. A hairy leg was touching him, chilling his flesh. Above him, the giant was thrashing impotently, and he found his neck free of the awful grip.

He wormed free. He was hardly conscious of reaching up and unlocking the door, and closing it tightly again as he stumbled forth. Later, it seemed that it was in a dream that he ran wildly into the splendid sunlight outside and down the winding trail. It was only by a tremendous effort that he kept his senses long enough to shove the rowboat out from the beach and hop in.

He never started the motor. All that he had seen and suffered on the island of horror overcame him too soon, and he pitched down in a limp, unconscious heap....

And so it was, that, the next morning, the two harbor policemen found a rowboat with mysterious cargo floating silently down the Detroit River. So it was that some time later a launch with three local officers churned up to the solitary island, and that gunshots echoed in the gloom of a hushed laboratory room, and a man's white-faced body was carried from the cabin where he had made his one great treacherous effort to steal another's fame.

101 The Moon Weed by Harl Vincent

Unwittingly the traitor of the Earth, Van pits himself against the inexorably tightening web of plant-beasts he has released from the moon.

Aproximate word count: 10,600

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

Hobart Madison pursed his lips in a whistle of incredulous surprise as he regarded the object that lay in the palm of his hand. An ordinary pebble, it seemed to be, but a pebble in which a strange fire smouldered and showed itself here and there through the dull surface.

"Would you mind repeating what you just said, Van?" he asked.

"You heard me the first time. I say that that's a diamond and that it came from the moon." Carl

Vanderventer glared at his friend in resentment of his doubting tone.

"Mean to tell me you've been there? To the moon?"

"Certainly not. I'm not a Jules Verne adventurer. But I'm telling you that stone is a diamond of the first water and that it came from the moon. Weighs over a hundred carats, too. You can have it appraised yourself if you think I'm kidding you."

Bart Madison laughed. "Don't get sore, Van," he said. "I'm not doubting your word. But Lord, man—the thing's so incredible! It takes a little time to soak in. And you say there are more?"

"Sure. This one's the largest of five I've found so far. And there's other stuff, too. Wait till you see. Fossils, beetles and things. I tell you, Bart, the moon was inhabited at one time. I've the evidence and I want you to be the first to see it." The eyes of the young scientist shone with excitement as he saw that his friend was roused to intense interest.

"So that's what all your experimenting has been aimed at. No wonder it cost so much."

"Yes, and you've been a brick for financing me. Never asked a question, either. But Bart, it'll all come back to you now. Know how much that stone's worth?"

"Plenty, I guess. But, forget about the financing and all that. Where's this laboratory of yours?" Madison had pushed his chair back from his desk and was reaching for his hat.

"Over in the Ramapo Mountains, not far from Tuxedo. I'll have you there in two hours. Sure you can spare the time to go out there now?" Vanderventer was enthusiastically eager.

"Spare the time? You just try and keep me from going!"

Neither of them noticed the sinister figure that lurked outside the door which led into the adjoining office. They chattered excitedly as they passed into the outer hall and made for the elevator.

Vanderventer's laboratory was a small domed structure set in a clearing atop the mountain and well hidden from the winding road which was the only means of approach. Though Bart Madison, who had inherited his father's prosperous brokerage business, had financed his friend's research work ever since the two left college, this was his first visit to the secluded workshop, and its wealth of equipment was revealed to him as a complete surprise. He had always thought of Van's experiments as something beyond his ken; something uncanny and mysterious. Now he was convinced.

The most prominent single piece of apparatus in the laboratory was a twelve-inch reflecting telescope which reared its latticed framework to a slit in the dome overhead. Paralleling its axis and secured to the same equatorial mounting was a shining tube of copper which bristled with handwheels and levers and was connected by heavy insulated cables to an amazing array of electrical machinery that occupied an entire side of the single room.

"Regular young observatory you've got here, Van,"

Bart commented when he had taken all this in in one sweeping glance of appraisal.

"Yeah, and then some. Not another like it in the world." Van was busying himself with the controls of his electrical equipment, and a powerful motor-generator started up with a click and a whirr as he closed a starting switch.

Madison watched in silence as the swift-fingered scientist fussed with the complicated adjustments of the apparatus and then turned to the massive concrete pedestal on which his telescope was mounted. At his touch of a button the instrument swung over on its polar axis to a new position. The slit in the dome was opened to the afternoon sky, revealing the lunar disc in its daytime faintness.

"You can see it just as well in daylight?" Bart asked as his friend peered through the eyepiece of the telescope and continued his adjustments.

"Sure, the surface is just as bright as at night. Doesn't seem so to your eye, but it's different through the

telescope. Here, take a look."

Bart squinted through the eyepiece and saw a huge crater with a shadowed spire in its center. Like a shell hole in soft earth it appeared—a great splash that had congealed immediately it was made. The cross-hairs of the eyepiece were centered on a small circular shadow near its inner rim.

"That," Van was saying, "is a prominent crater near the Mare Nubium. The spot under the cross-hairs is that from which I have obtained the diamonds—and other things. Watch this now, Bart."

The young broker straightened up and saw that his friend was removing the cover from a crystal bowl that was attached to the lower end of the copper tube that pointed to the heavens at the same ascension and declination as the telescope. The air of the room vibrated to a strange energy when he closed a switch that lighted a dozen vacuum tubes in the apparatus that lined the wall.

"You say you bring the stuff here with a light ray?" he

asked.

"No, I said with the speed of light. This tube projects a ray of vibrations—like directional radio, you know—and this ray has a component that disintegrates the object it strikes and brings it back to us as dissociated protons and electrons which are reassembled in the original form and structure in this crystal bowl. Watch."

A misty brilliance filled the bowl's interior. Intangible shadowy forms seemed to be taking shape within a swirling maze of ethereal light that hummed and crackled with astounding vigor. Then, abruptly, the apparatus was silent and the light gone, revealing an odd object that had taken form in the bowl.

"A starfish!" Bart gasped.

"Yeah, and fossilized." Van handed it to him and he took it in his fingers gingerly as if expecting it to burn them.

The thing was undoubtedly a starfish, and of light,

spongy stone. Its color was a pale blue and the ambulacral suckers were clearly discernible on all five rays.

"Lord! You're sure this is from the moon?" Bart turned the starfish over in his hand and gazed stupidly at his friend.

"Certainly, you nut. Think I had it up my sleeve? But here, watch again, there's something else."

The crackling, misty light again filled the bowl.

"Suppose," Bart ventured, "you bring in something large—big as a house, let's say. What would it do to your machine?"

"Can't. The ray'll only pick up stuff that'll enter the bowl. Look—here's the next arrival."

The mysterious light died down and the scientist picked up the second object with trembling fingers. It was a knife of beautiful workmanship, fashioned from obsidian and obviously the work of human hands.

"There! Didn't I tell you?" Van gloated. "Guess that shows there were living beings on the moon."

He made minute changes in the adjustment of his marvelous instrument and Bart watched in dazed astonishment as object after object materialized before their eyes. There were fragments of strange minerals; more fossils, marine life, mostly; a roughly beaten silver plate; three diamonds, none of which was as large as what Van had taken to New York, but all of considerable value.

"This'll be something for the papers, Van!" Bart Madison was visioning the fame that was to come to his friend.

"Yeah, all but the diamonds."

All but the diamonds is right!"

These words were spoken by a sarcastic voice, chill as an icicle, that came from the open door. They wheeled to look into the muzzles of two automatic pistols that were trained on them by a stocky individual who

faced them with a twisted, knowing grin.

"Danny Kelly!" Bart gasped, raising his hands slowly to the level of his shoulders. He knew the ex-army captain was a dead shot with the service pistol, and a desperate man since his disgrace and forced resignation. "What's the big idea?" he demanded.

"You don't need to ask. Refused me a loan this morning, didn't you? Now I'm getting it this way." Kelly turned savagely on Van, prodding his ribs with a pistol. "Get 'em up, you!" he snapped.

Van had been slow in raising his hands, gaping in stupefied amazement at the intruder. Now he reached for the ceiling without delay.

"You'll serve time for this, Danny!" Bart shouted.

"Shut up! I know what I'm doing. And back up, too—where—no, the other door." Kelly was forcing him toward the door of the cellar at the point of one pistol as he kept Van covered with the other.

Bart clenched his fist and brought it down in a sudden sweeping blow that raked Kelly's cheek and ear with stunning force. But the gunman recovered in a flash, dropped the muzzle of his pistol and pulled the trigger. Drilled through the thigh, Bart staggered through the open door and fell the length of the stairs into the darkness of the cellar. Kelly laughed evilly as he slammed the door and turned the key.

"Hold it, you!" he snarled as he swung on Van who had dropped his hands and crouched for a spring. "If I drill you, it won't be through the leg. I'll take those diamonds now."

He pocketed one of his pistols, and, keeping the other pressed to the pit of Van's stomach, went through his pockets. Then he added those on the tray by the crystal bowl to the collection, and transferred the entire lot to his own pocket.

"Now, you clever engineer," he grinned, "we'll just operate this trick machine of yours for a while and collect some more. Hop to it!" He watched narrowly as Van stretched his fingers to the controls. "No

monkey business, either," he grated; "you'll not change a single adjustment. I've been listening to you and I know the clock of the telescope is keeping the ray trained on the same spot. You just operate the ray and nothing else. Get me?"

Van did not think it expedient to tell him of the drift caused by inaccuracies in the clock and perturbations of the moon's motion. He was playing for time, trying to plan a course of action.

"There may not be any more diamonds," he offered as he tripped the release of the ray.

"Oh, there'll be more. Don't try to kid me."

An irregular block of quartz materialized in the bowl and Kelly tossed it to the floor in savage disgust. Then a small diamond, very small; but he pocketed it nevertheless. The next object was a strange one—a dried seed pod about six inches in length and of brilliant red color. The ray had shifted to a new position on the lunar surface. Another and another of the strange legumes followed, one of them bursting

open and scattering its contents, bright red like the enclosing pod to rattle over the floor like tiny glass beads. Kelly snorted his disgust.

"Still some sort of vegetation out there," Van muttered. The eternal scientist in the man could not be downed by a mere hold-up.

"Can the chatter!" Kelly snarled as the crystal bowl gave up another of the useless pods and still another. He gathered up the evidence of lunar vegetation, a half dozen of the pods, and threw them through the open doorway with a savage gesture. "You trying to put one over on me?" he bellowed.

"How can I?" Van retorted mildly. "I haven't touched a handwheel." He was wondering vaguely whether this lunar seed would grow in earthly soil; what sort of a plant it would produce under the new environment.

Kelly was becoming nervous now. It seemed that little was to be gained by hanging around this crazy man's laboratory. He had a sizable fortune in rough stones already. That big one alone, when properly cut into

smaller stones, would make him independent. Maybe there weren't any more, anyway. And the longer he stayed the greater chance there was of getting caught.

The advent of another of the pods decided him. A quick blow with the butt of his pistol stretched Van on the floor and Kelly fled the scene.

Bart was pounding furiously on the cellar door when Van first took hazy note of his surroundings. Several uncertain minutes passed before he was able to stagger across the room and release his friend.

"Where is he?" Bart demanded, swaying on his feet and blinking in the sudden light.

"Gone. Socked me and beat it with the diamonds." Van was mopping the blood from his eyes with a handkerchief. "Are you hit bad?" he inquired.

"No, just a flesh wound. Hurts like the devil, though. How about yourself?" Bart limped to his side and sighed with relief when he examined his bleeding

scalp. "Not so bad yourself, old man. Where's your first aid kit?"

Van was still somewhat dazed and merely pointed to the cabinet. "Fine pair we turned out to be!" he grumbled after his head had cleared a bit under Bart's vigorous cleansing of the cut on his temple. "Here we stood, meek as a couple of lambs, and let that guy get away with murder."

"Yeah, but those forty-fives made the difference. Ouch!" Bart winced as his friend poured fresh iodine over the wound in his leg. "Have a heart, will you?"

They were startled into silence by a hoarse, strangled scream that came from outside the laboratory. "Help! Help!" someone repeated in a panicky voice—a voice which at once ended on a gurgled note of despair.

"It's Kelly!" Bart whispered. "He's come back. Something's happened to him." He started for the open door.

"Wait a minute. It may be a trick to get us outside

where he can pop us off."

"No, it isn't. For God's sake, look!" Bart had reached the door and was pointing at the ground with shaking forefinger.

The entire clearing seemed to be alive with wriggling things—long rubbery tentacles that crawled along the ground, reaching curling ends high in the air and had even started climbing the trees at the edge of the clearing. Blood red they were, and partially transparent in the light of the setting sun; growing things, attached by their thick ends to swelling mounds of red that seemed anchored to the ground. Translucent stalks rose from the mounds and sprouted huge buds that burst and blossomed into flaming flowers a foot in diameter, then withered and went to seed in a moment of time. But always the weaving tendrils shot forth with lightning speed, reaching and feeling their uncanny way along the ground and over tree stumps into the woods. One of them emerged from a hollow stump with its slender end coiled around the tiny body of a chattering gray squirrel.

"The moon flowers!" Van cried.

"What do you mean—moon flowers?"

"Dried seed pods. They came over into the bowl, and Kelly threw them out. Now look at the damned things. They're alive!"

Kelly's voice came to them once more from behind the barrier of rapidly growing vegetation. "Help!" he screeched. "I'll give back the diamonds—anything! Only get me away from the things!"

"Ought to let 'em get him," Van growled.

Bart shivered. "Too horrible, Van. Got an ax or anything?"

"There's a hatchet around back. Maybe we can—"

But the young broker had scuttled around the corner of the building and Van looked after him anxiously. The vile red tendrils were reaching for the east wall of the laboratory, and he saw that their inner surfaces

were covered with tiny suckers like those on the arms of a devil-fish. Carnivorous plants, undoubtedly, these awful half-animal, half-vegetable things whose seed had been transported across a quarter million miles of space. Man eaters! Deadly, and growing with incredible speed. Even the short-lived flowers were fearsome, as they opened their scarlet pansy-like faces and stared a moment before they folded up and shriveled into the seed cases like those that had materialized in the crystal bowl.

Then he noticed that the pods were opening and spreading more of the terrible seed. Nothing could stop this weird growth, now. It would cover the country like a sea of flaming horror, overcoming and devouring every living thing. Cold fear clutched at Van as he realized the enormity of the calamity that had come to the earth.

Bart was skirting the edge of the clearing with the hatchet in his hand, and Van tried to call out to him, to warn him. But his voice caught in his throat, and instead he ran to his assistance, circling the spreading menace to get around behind where Kelly

was still shouting. Damn Kelly anyway! This never would have happened if he hadn't come on the scene!

Kelly was in the woods, wedged into the crotch of a tree and striking wildly at the clutching tendrils with his clubbed pistol. They mashed easily and dripping red, but were not to be deterred from their ghastly purpose. Kelly's time would have indeed been short had not his erstwhile victims come to the rescue. One of the thickest of the twining things encircled his body and had him pinned to the tree. His breath was coming in gasps as its tightening coils increased their pressure. His coarse features were livid and his eyes bulged from their sockets.

Bart hacked and hacked at the rubbery growth until he had him free; jerked him from his perch, blubbering and whining like a schoolboy. His shirt had been torn from his breast and they saw a great red welt where the blood had been drawn through the pores by those terrible suckers.



"Look out, Bart!" Van shouted.

Another of the creeping things had come through the underbrush and was wrapping its coils around Bart's ankle. Another and another wriggled through, and soon they were battling for their own freedom. Kelly staggered off into the woods and went crashing down the hill, leaving them to take care of themselves as best they might.

The stench of the viscous liquid that oozed from the injured tendrils was nauseous; it had something of a soporific effect; and the two friends found themselves fighting the terror in a growing mist of red that blinded and confused them. Then, miraculously, they were free and Van assisted Bart as they ran through the forest. When they reached the road, weak and out of breath, they were just in time to see Kelly's roadster vanish around the bend.

"Yeah, he'd give back the diamonds—the swine!" Van muttered vindictively. Then, shrugging his shoulders, "Well, they won't be much good to him, anyway. Wouldn't be any good to us either, as far as that goes."

"What do you mean? Aren't they real?" Bart was raising himself painfully into the seat of Van's car, his wounded leg suddenly very much in the way.

"Sure they're real. But don't you realize what this thing means—this ungodly growth that's started?"

"Why—why, no. You mean it'll keep on growing?"

"And how! Those inner stalks drop a new batch of seeds every five minutes or so. Presto!—a flock of new plants spring up ten feet from the first; dozens of them for every pod that drops. You know how geometrical progression works out. They'll cover the whole country—the whole world. Lord!"

"Man alive, this is terrible! I hadn't thought of that before. What'll we do?"

"Yeah, that's the question: what can we do?" Van started his motor and jerked the car to the road.

"First off, we're going to get away from here—fast!"

Bart gripped his arm as he shifted into second gear.

"Look, Van!" he babbled. "They're out of the woods already. Loose! The red snakes are loose from their stalks. They're alive, I tell you!"

It was true. Several of the slimy red things were wriggling their way over the macadam like great earthworms, but moving with the speed of hurrying pedestrians. Free, and untrammelled by the roots and stems of the mother plants, they had set forth on their

own in the search for beings of flesh and blood to destroy. Millions of their kind would follow; billions!

In sudden panic Van stepped on the gas.

Fifteen minutes later, with shrieking siren, a motorcycle drew alongside and forced them to the curb. "Where's the fire?" the sarcastic voice of a stern-visaged officer demanded, when Van had brought his car to a screeching stop. Seventy-five, the speedometer had read but a moment before.

"It's life and death, officer," Van started to explain. "We must get to the proper officials to warn the—"

"Aw, tell it to the judge! Come on now, follow me."

"But officer, there's death on its way from the hills, I tell you. Red, creeping things that'll be here in a couple of hours—"

"Get away, from that wheel. I'll drive you in meself. You're fulla applejack."

Bart had opened the door on his side and was limping his way around the back of the car. This was serious. They had to get away; had to spread the word in a way that would be believed before it was too late. The officer was tugging at Van's arm, astonishment and black rage showing in his weather-beaten countenance. Speeding, drunk, resisting an officer—they'd never get out of this mess! A swift uppercut interrupted the proceedings. Bart's leg was numb and stiff, but his good right arm was working smoothly and with all its old time precision. His second punch was a haymaker. With his full weight behind it, it drove straight to the chin and stretched the officer on the concrete. Thoughtfully, Bart removed his pistol from its holster before scrambling in at Van's side.

"Boy, now we're in for it!" he gasped.

"And we might as well make a good job while we're at it." Van let in his clutch with a jerk, and again they were breaking all traffic regulations.

It was dusk when they roared in through the gate at the Rockland County Airport and pulled up at the

hangar office. Van rushed in, shouting for Bill Petersen, and Bart followed. A slender, fair-haired youth in rumpled flying togs greeted them.

"Bill, my friend, Bart Madison," Van blurted without pausing for breath. "Listen, we've got to have a plane right away. Got one with a radio?"

"Yes, but what's all the rush? Where you going?"

"Albany. Right away. Make it snappy, will you?"

"Sure, but what's it all about?" Young Petersen was leading them to the field where a sleek mono-plane was in waiting as if they had ordered it. "Warm her up, Joe," he called to the mechanic.

"Listen, Bill—I never lied to you, did I?" Van asked, when they were seated in the plane's cabin.

"Not that I know of. But sometimes I've thought you were lying, until I saw with my own eyes the things you had told me about. What is it this time?"

"Death and destruction. Coming down out of the Ramapos. We've got to warn the country. Plants, Bill—squirmey red plants with long feelers that can twist around a man and devour him. Half animal, they are, and the feelers break loose and crawl by themselves. Multiplying like nothing you ever saw. Millions of them in an hour."

"What?" Petersen stared incredulously as his motor roared into life. Then he gave his attention to the business of taking off. He jerked the thumb of his free hand toward the radio.

Van's expert fingers manipulated the switches and dials of the portable apparatus, and its vacuum tubes glowed into life. "2BXX calling 2TIM," he droned into the microphone.

"Who's that?" Bart asked. The drone of the motor was barely audible in the closed cabin and did not interfere.

"The Times. Trying to get Johnny Forbes. If anyone can get this thing across, he can. Wait a minute, here

they are." He closed his eyes as he listened to the murmuring voice in the headphones.

Then he was talking rapidly, forcefully, and the young flyer gazed with owlish solemnity at Bart as they listened to his conversation. It was plain that Bill was but half inclined to believe, though impressed by the earnestness and evident apprehension displayed by his two passengers.

"Yes, 2BXX," Van was saying. "Connect me with Johnny Forbes, please—in a hurry. Yes.... Hello, Johnny, it's Van—Carl Vanderventer, you know. Yes; got a scoop for you, but first I want you to get it in the broadcasts. Get me? It's about a man-eating plant that's starting to overrun the country. No—listen now, I'm not dreaming—listen—"

The frantic scientist rambled on and on about the seed from the moon, the red death that was creeping down from the mountains, the horror of the calamity as he and Bart had visioned it. Then, with a sudden note of despair, his voice trailed off into nothingness and he turned a drawn white face to his two friends.

"Laughed at me. Hung up on me," he groaned. "Good God! We've got to do something—quick!"

"Be in Albany in an hour," the pilot suggested. "What you going to do there?" He believed, now. His expression of horror showed it.

"See the governor. But, man, it's an hour wasted! We must stir up the country—get the word to Washington—everywhere. It might be possible to fight the things some way if we can mobilize State and National resources quickly enough. Bill, Bart, what can we do?"

The plane sped on through the night under control of her gyro-pilot as the three men racked their brains for a solution of the problem. If a hard-boiled newspaper man would not believe the story, who could?

"I've got it!" Bart shouted suddenly. "Can either of you pound a key—code, I mean?"

"Sure, I can. Then what?" Petersen returned.

"Fake an S. O. S. Don't you see? All broadcasting has to stop, and every ship at sea, every air liner in this part of the country'll be listening—standing by. Give 'em the story in code. Let 'em think we're in a ship from the moon—captured by Lunarians who are here to destroy the world with this weed of theirs—anything. Make it as weird as possible. Most everyone'll think it's a hoax, but there are ten thousand kids—amateurs—who'll be listening in. Somebody'll believe it, and, believe me, there'll be some investigating in the neighborhood of the growth in no time."

"By George, I believe that'll do it!" Van exclaimed.
"And the broadcasters listen in for an S. O. S. themselves. Got to, you know, so they know when to start up again. Some smart announcer will tell the story—maybe even believe it. The trick will work, sure as shooting!"

The pilot glanced at his instruments and saw that the automatic gyro-apparatus was functioning properly. Then he moved over to the radio and threw the switch that put the key in circuit instead of the microphone.

Rapidly he ticked off the three dots, three dashes, and again three dots that spelled the dread danger signal of the air. Over and over he repeated the signal, and then he listened for results.

"It worked!" he gloated, after a moment. "They're all signing off—the broadcasters. The Navy Yard in Brooklyn gives me the go-ahead."

He pounded out the absurd message with swift fingers, pausing occasionally to ask a pertinent question of Van or Bart. At Van's request he added a warning to all residents of New York State west of the Hudson River and of northern New Jersey to flee their homes without delay. He even asked that the message be relayed to the governors of the two states, and that Governor Perkins of New York be advised that they were on their way to Albany to discuss the situation. But he balked at the story of the Lunarians, telling instead the equally strange truth regarding the origin of the deadly growth, and adding the names of Van and Bart to lend authenticity to the tale.

Then he signed off and switched the radio receiver to

the loud speaker before returning to the pilot's seat.

Bart tuned in on the various broadcasters as they resumed their programs, finally settling on WOR, Newark, whose announcer was reading the strange message to his radio public with appropriate comment. A crime and an outrage he called it, an affront to the industry and to the public. An insult to the government of the United States. But wait! A telephone call had just been received at the station from the village of Sloatesburg. A reputable citizen of that town had reported the red growth at the edge of the State road—huge red earthworms wriggling across the concrete. Another call, and another! The announcer's voice was rising hysterically.

"It did work, Bart," Van exulted. "Now the hell starts popping."

Governor Perkins met them in person when they arrived at the Municipal Airport in Albany. A great crowd had gathered in the shadows outside the brilliance of the flood lights, and a police escort rushed them to the governor's private car.

"Here's where you go to the Bastille for socking that cop," Van observed. His spirits had risen appreciably since that successful S. O. S. call.

But the governor was in a serious mood, as they made their way toward the executive mansion through the milling crowds that lined the hilly streets of the capital city of New York State. Proofs had not been lacking of the truth of Bill Petersen's radio warning. Already the spreading red death had covered a circle some eight miles in diameter, covering farm lands and destroying the crops, blocking the roads and trapping many on the streets and in their homes in nearby towns. More than a hundred had lost their lives, and thousands were fleeing the threatened area. The country was in an uproar.

"Gentlemen," the governor said, when they had reached the privacy of his chambers, "this is a serious matter, and no time must be lost in dealing with it. Nevertheless, I want you, Mr. Vanderventer, to tell your story of the thing to me and to the radio system of the United States Secret Service. The President himself will be listening, as will the chief executives of

most of the states. Hold nothing back, as the fate of our people is at stake."

So Van faced the microphone and related the history of his work in the little laboratory in the Ramapo Mountains. He told of his interest in the earth's satellite, and of his first unsuccessful experiments with ultra-telescopes in the endeavor to explore its surface close at hand; of the failure of a space-ship he had built; of the final discovery of the ray, by means of which it was possible to transport solid objects from the one body to the other. He told of the discovery of man-made relics and of fossils; he told of the diamonds, and of the attack by Dan Kelly which had resulted in the spreading of the seed of the deadly moon weed. He even related the incident of the traffic policeman, at which the governor smiled.

"That has been reported," he said, "and you need have no fear on that score.—The charges will be dropped. I now ask that you give us your opinion as to the best method of combatting this new enemy. Have you any ideas?"

"I have not, sir," Van replied gloomily, "though I believe it can be done only from the air. Possibly bombing, or a gas of some sort—I don't know. It will take time, Mr. Governor."

"Yes, and meanwhile the thing is overwhelming us at what rate?"

"As nearly as I can estimate it, the growth is moving with a speed of four or five miles an hour."

"By morning you expect it will have traveled forty or fifty miles in all directions?"

"I'm afraid so."

A sharp buzz from the instrument on the governor's desk interrupted them. "The President," he whispered.

"That is enough, Governor," came the husky tones of President Alford's voice. "I shall communicate with Secretary Makely at once. All available army bombing-planes will be rushed to the scene. You, sir,

will mobilize the militia, as will the governors of the other states. Meanwhile, this young scientist is to report to the Bureau of Scientific Research in Washington—to-night. Have him bring a supply of these seeds with him."

That was all. Governor Perkins offered no comment, but merely rose from his seat to indicate that the discussion was ended. A solemn silence reigned in the room.

"Let's go!" exclaimed Bill Petersen suddenly, unawed by the presence of the governor. "My ship's waiting, and we can stop off for a couple of those pods and still make Washington in two hours. Come on!"

Governor Perkins smiled. "Good luck, boys," he said, as they were ushered from the room. "My car will return you to the airport. And remember, the country will be watching you now, and expecting much from you. Good-by."

They were to recall his words in the dark days ahead.

Before they had reached Newburgh, they saw a dull red glow in the skies that told them the news broadcast to which they had been listening had not exaggerated. The red glow was luminous in darkness. Off there to the south-west, it was as if a vast forest fire were lighting the heavens. No wonder the panics and rioting were getting out of control of the police!

Coming up over Bear Mountain, they caught their first glimpse of the sea of fire that was the red death by night. Like a vast bed of glowing embers it covered the countryside, extending eastward to Haverstraw where it was temporarily halted by the broad Hudson. It was a shimmering, undulating mass of living, luminous things, eating their horrible way through all organic matter that stood in their path. Writhing, squirming, all-absorbing monsters that sent out an advance guard of independent snake-like tendrils to capture and hold for the lagging mother-plants whatever of live stock and humanity they were able to find.

"Think they'll get over the river, Van?" Bart asked.

"Sure they will. Every fugitive who had a narrow escape after being in contact with the things is a potential carrier of the seed. I found several of them sticking to my clothing after we got away. I picked a couple off your coat, but didn't tell you."

"Lord! What did you do with them?"

"Put them in the ash receiver in my car—like a fool. Wouldn't have to go down for more if I'd kept them."

"Well, it can't be helped now. We'll have a job getting some down there now, too."

"I'll say so." Van lapsed into gloomy silence.

They were over the landing field above Tomkins Cove, and Bill turned on the siren whose raucous shriek operated the mechanism of the floodlight switches by sound vibrations. The field sprang into instant illumination, and they circled it once before swooping to a landing. They were but a mile from the advancing terror.

The field was deserted, and the three men started off immediately in the direction of the oncoming weed.

"We'll have to make it snappy," Van grunted. "We've got about twelve minutes to get the pods and get back to the ship. The damn things'll be here by that time."

They scrambled over fences and pushed through thickets. The lighted windows of a deserted farmhouse were directly ahead, and they ran through the open gate and across the fields. Ever, the glow of the weed grew brighter. A terrified horse galloped wildly past them and crashed into the fence, whinnying piteously as it went down with a broken leg. They could see the red rim of the advancing horror just beyond the road.

One of the detached tendrils slithered past, each glowing coil distinctly visible.

"Lucky the things can't see!" Bart shuddered.

"Yeah," said Van. "Have to dodge 'em to get in close enough to one of the plants. Keep your eyes peeled

now, you fellows, in case one of us gets caught."

A terrific explosion rocked the ground. They had paid no heed to the roaring of motors overhead. The bombers were on the job! Shooting skyward, a column of flame not a hundred yards from them showed where the high explosive had landed in the red mass. Then, slimy wriggling things rained all about them, fragments of the red weed that still squirmed and crawled and clung. Bill Petersen yelled and clutched at his neck where one of the things had taken hold.

Another warning whistle of a falling bomb. Crash! More of the horror raining down and splattering as it fell. Whistle—crash! A huge blob of quivering, luminous jelly fell before them—a portion of one of the mother-plants. Crash! Crash!

"Run!" Van shouted. "Run for the plane. We'll never make it now. Damn those bombers, anyway!"

All along the advancing front, the bombs were bursting, shattering the air with their detonations and

scattering the glowing red stems and tendrils in all directions. The din was appalling, and the increasing brightness of the crimson glow added to the horror of the situation. Stumbling and cursing, they ran for the plane.

"Fools! Fools!" Bill was shouting. "Can't they see the field and the plane? Why in the devil are they dropping them so near?"

Then Bart was down, clawing at a three-foot length of red tendril that had fallen on him and borne him to the earth.

"Bart! Bart!" Van turned back and was tearing at the thing with fingers that were slippery with the sap that oozed from its torn skin. Monstrous earthworms! Cut them apart and each portion lived on, took on new vigor. And these vile things could sting like a jellyfish! Where each sucker touched the skin a burning sore remained.

Bill helped them break away from the thing, and all three fought on toward the lights of the landing field.

Only a short way off now; it seemed they would never reach it. The bombers were dropping their missiles with unceasing regularity, and the red death only spread the faster.

When they scrambled into the cabin of the plane, the red wall of creeping horror was almost upon them. Advancing speedily out from the red-lit darkness, it seemed to halt momentarily, when it emerged into the brilliance of the great arc-lights which illuminated the field. Then, more slowly and with seemingly purposeful deliberation, the wriggling feelers reached out from the mass and bore down upon them. Bill slammed the door and latched it, then fumbled frantically with the starter switch. A most welcome sound was the answering roar of the motor.

The pilot yanked his ship into the air, taking off with the wind rather than running the risk of remaining on the ground long enough to taxi around and head into it. The plane acted like a frightened bird as Bill struggled with the controls, darting this way and that, and once missing a crash by inches as the tail was lifted by the treacherous ground wind. Then they

were clear, and slowly gained altitude in a steep climb.

"Whew!" Van exclaimed, mopping his red-splattered forehead with his handkerchief. "That was a narrow squeak, boys. And we haven't got the seeds yet—unless we can find a few on our clothing."

"Who said so?" Bart gloated. "Look at this."

He opened his clenched fist and disclosed one of the pods, unbroken and gleaming horribly scarlet in the dim light of the cabin. Bill heaved a sigh of relief as he banked the ship and swung around toward the south. He had dreaded another landing near the sea of moon weed. Van chortled over their good fortune as he examined the mysterious pod. One good thing the bombers had done, anyway! Blew one of the things into his friend's hands.

Bart and the young pilot found themselves very much out of the picture when they reported with Van at the Research Building in Washington. The Government had no use for them in this emergency: it was the

scientist they wanted, and he was immediately rushed into conference with the heads of the Bureau. His two friends were left to shift for themselves, and they joined the crowds in the street.

The name of Carl Vanderventer was on everyone's tongue. Cursing and reviling him, they were, for the hare-brained experiment which had been the cause of the terrible disaster. Fools! Bart seethed with rage and nearly came to blows with a number of vociferous agitators who were advocating a necktie-party. Why hadn't the officials published the entire story as Van told it over the Secret Service radio? There was no mention of Dan Kelly in the broadcast news, nor of the fact that the police were searching for him in every city and town in the country. Another instance of the results of secrecy in governmental activities!

"We'd better find ourselves a room and turn in," Bart growled. "Let's get out of this mob before I slam somebody."

Bill Petersen was only too willing. He was suddenly very tired.

In the Willard Hotel they were assigned to an excellent room, and Bart insisted on switching on the broadcasts and listening to the news. Far into the night he sat by the loud-speaker, or paced the floor as an exceptionally calamitous happening was reported. But Bill slept through it all.

The army bombers had been recalled. Their efforts had worked more harm than good. The invincible moon weed now had crossed the Hudson River at Nyack and Piermont. Tarrytown was overrun, and many of the inhabitants had lost their lives either in the maws of the insatiable monsters or in the panics and rioting that accompanied the evacuation of the town.

New Jersey was covered as far south as New Brunswick, and west to Phillipsburg and Belvidere. At Mauch Chunk the contents of twenty oil tanks had been diverted to the Delaware River, and the floating oil film was proving at least a temporary protection to a considerable portion of the state of Pennsylvania. In New York State the growth had buried hill and valley, town and village, as far as Monticello, and, along the

Hudson, extended as far north as Kingston. At Poughkeepsie, on the opposite side of the river, frantic householders had armed themselves with rifles and shotguns, and were killing off all refugees who attempted to land from boats at that point. But the militia was on guard at the bridges, assuring safe crossing to the thousands who fled the red death over these routes. There was no keeping the seed of the moon weed from finding its way east.

At some points fire had been used with considerable success as a barrier, hundreds of acres of forest lands being destroyed in the endeavor to stem the crimson tide. But, after the ashes were cool, germination would recur, and the weed would continue on its triumphant way. Acid sprays and poison-gas of various kinds had been tried without appreciable effect. The casualty estimates already ran into the tens of thousands; rumor had it that nearly one hundred thousand had lost their lives in the city of Newark alone. There was no way in which the figures could be checked while everything was in a state of confusion.

Communication lines were broken, roads blocked, gas

and electric supply systems paralyzed and the railroads helpless. Trains could not be driven through the glutinous, wriggling mass that piled high on the tracks. Only the radio and the air lines were operative in the stricken area, and even these were of little value to the unfortunates who, in many cases, were surrounded and cut off from all hope of succor.

At four in the morning, with aching heart and reeling brain, Bart threw himself on the bed without undressing and fell into the troubled sleep of exhaustion and despair.

The next day brought no encouragement, though it was reported that the growth developed with less rapidity after sunrise than it had during the night. Bart endeavored to get Van on the telephone, but was curtly informed by the operator at the Research Building that no incoming calls could be transferred to the laboratory where he was working. Knowing his friend, he pictured him as working feverishly with the Government engineers and giving no thought to sleep or food. He'd kill himself, sure! But such a death, even, was preferable to the red one of the moon

weed.

The Canadians and Mexicans had been quick to protect their borders and forbid the landing of any American aircraft or the passage of trains and automobiles. But the seed had reached Europe, one of the twelve-hour night air-liners having carried a thousand refugees who had sufficient foresight and the means to engage passage. It was a world catastrophe they faced!

By mid-afternoon the streets of Washington were almost deserted. It was less than twenty-four hours since the first moon seed took root, and already the crimson growth had progressed nearly a hundred miles southward from the point of origin! Another twenty or thirty hours and it would reach the capital city—unless Van and those engineers over in the Research Building discovered something; a miracle.

Bart tried the telephone once more and was overjoyed when the operator, all apologies now, informed him that Van had been trying to reach him for several hours.

"Listen, old man," his friend's voice came over the wire: "I've been worried as the devil not knowing where you were. I want you and Bill to stick around where I can get you at any time. I may need you. Where are you staying?"

"The Willard. Have you doped out something?" Bart answered in quick excitement.

"Maybe. Can't let anything out yet—not till we've tested it thoroughly. But I can tell you that a hundred factories are already working on machines we've devised. By good luck it only means minor changes to an apparatus that is on the market in large quantity."

"Great stuff. The city's nearly emptied itself, you know, and, boy, how they've been razzing you over the radio and in the papers—howling for your hide, the whole country."

"I know." Van's voice was calm, but Bart sensed in it something of a cold fury that was new to him in his friend. The young scientist was bitterly resentful of the attitude of the public.

"Can we see you, Van?"

"No, nor call me either. Better hang around the hotel and wait for a call from me. So long now, Bart. I've got to get busy."

"So long."

Bart gazed solemnly at Bill Petersen, who had been listening abstractedly to the one-sided conversation. Bill had given up hope and was resigned to the inevitable.

"Says he may need us, Bill," said Bart.

"Yeah? Well, we'll be ready for anything he wants us to do. It's no use though—anything."

"What do you mean—no use? You never saw Van licked yet, did you?"

"Sure I did. By his super-telescopes and the rocket ship."

"But this is different." Bart was a staunch defender of his friend. He glared at Bill for a moment and then switched on the news broadcast which he knew he detested.

The progress of the moon weed continued unabated. In the city of New York a million souls were reported as having lost their lives, and this in spite of the difficulty experienced by the uncanny moon weed in obtaining a foothold in Manhattan. It had been thought that the asphalt and concrete would prove an effective barrier, and so they did for a time. But, with the seed active in the parks and along the water fronts, it was not long before the powerful roots of the greedy plants worked their way underneath, ripping up pavements and wriggling into cellars as they progressed. The city was a mass of wreckage and a maelstrom of fighting, dying humanity.

Whole regiments of the National Guard were wiped out as they fought off the weed with ax and bayonet, in the effort to provide time for the refugees to clear from their homes in certain localities. All transportation facilities to the south and west were

taxed to the utmost. There was fighting and killing for the possession of automobiles and planes and for room in trains and buses. Air-line terminals and railroad stations were the scenes of dreadful massacres as the police and military guards fought off the crazed and desperate creatures who attacked them en masse. And still the news announcers prated of the responsibility of one Carl Vanderverter.

The telephone bell rang, and Bart answered it in relief. At last they were to see some action! But no, it was merely the desk clerk, notifying him that all employees were leaving the hotel and that they would be left to shift for themselves. Yes, there was plenty of food in the kitchens; they were welcome to it. And a permanent telephone connection would be made to their room. The frightened clerk wished them luck.

In endless monotone, the voice of the news announcer droned on. Binghamton and Elmira, Albany and Schenectady, New Haven, Philadelphia, Allentown—all had succumbed. The casualty estimates now ran into the millions. The mist, the red mist that rose from the steaming weed, was drifting westward and

spreading the seed with ever increasing rapidity. For now the monstrous growth from out the sky was adapting itself to its environment; providing the seed with feathery tufts that permitted the winds to carry them far and wide like the seed of a dandelion.

"Turn off that damn thing!" Bill shouted. And he jumped to his feet, his eyes glinting strangely in the twilight gloom of the room. Bill was close to the breaking point.

"Guess you're right," Bart mumbled. "Not good for either of us to listen to that stuff." He switched off the receiver, and they sat in silence as darkness fell over the city.

Bill shivered and felt for the button of the electric light which he pressed with a trembling finger. They blinked in the sudden illumination, but it cheered them somewhat. It was not good to sit in the darkness and think. Besides, they knew that the turbine generators of Potomac Edison were still running. Some brave souls were sticking to their jobs—for a time, at least.

"God!" Bill suddenly groaned, after an endless time of dead silence. "My sister! Lives in Pittsburgh, you know. Wonder if she and the kids got away. It won't be long before the damn stuff gets there."

Bart thanked his lucky stars that he had no family ties. "Oh, they've had plenty of warning," he tried to console Bill. "Hours, you know; and the westbound lines are in good shape from there. I wouldn't worry about them if I were you."

There was utter silence once more. Even the customary street noises was lacking. Both men jumped nervously when the shrill siren of a police motorcycle sounded in the distance. Bart thought grimly of his fracas with the officer who had tried to arrest Van. How long ago that seemed, and how inconsequential an incident!

Their windows faced north, and by midnight they could make out the red glow of the moon weed, that awful band of flickering crimson that painted the horizon the color of blood. The telephone clamored for attention and Bill stifled a hysterical sob as the

terrifying sound broke the eery stillness.

Van was on the way to get them! He had a Government car and they were to go to Arlington for Bill's plane. Then what? He refused to commit himself: they must follow him blindly. Anything was better than this inactivity, though. Bart shouted with glee.

"We're going north," Van replied shortly, in answer to Bart's question when they entered the official car in front of the hotel, "after Dan Kelly."

"After Dan Kelly? Got a line on him?"

"Yes. Secret Service reports him in Toronto. The Canucks are after him now, but, by God, I'm going to get him myself!"

Van was haggard and wan, his eyes gleaming with a fanatical light. The strain had done something to him—something Bart didn't like at all. This was a different Van from the man who had entered his office two days previously. Unshaven and unkempt, he

looked and talked like a drunken man on the verge of delirium tremens.

"What's the idea, Van?" he asked gently.

"I'm going to get him. I tell you. The scum! It's his fault the whole world's against me. I'll get him, Bart; I'll kill him with my bare hands!"

So that was it! The combination of gruelling labor in the effort to save mankind from the dread moon weed, and bitter censure from the very people he was trying to save, had been too much for Van. He had developed a fixation, unreasoning and murderous; he'd get even with the man who had caused the trouble. And nothing could deter him from his purpose: Bart could see that. Might as well humor him and help him. It made little difference, anyway, with the red doom spreading at its present rate. They'd all be victims in a few days.

They were speeding through the streets of Washington at a break-neck rate. Van bent over the wheel, and like a demented man glued his wildly

staring eyes to the road.

"What about your work?" Bart asked, after a while.

"Has anything been accomplished?"

"Yes and no. They'll be ready to shoot in a few hours. Don't know whether it'll be a complete success or not. But I sneaked away anyhow. This other thing's more important to me right now."

"What's the dope? Can you tell us now?"

"Sure. I've got one of the machines in the car and I'll explain when we're on our way to Canada."

This wasn't like Van. Never secretive and always in good humor, he was treating his friends like annoying strangers.

"You can't land in Canada," Bill ventured, as they pulled up at the gate of the airport.

"Like hell I can't! You watch my smoke, and let any bloody Canuck up there try and stop me!"

He was lifting a small black case from the luggage carrier of the car as he replied. Bart silenced the airman with a look.

When they had taken off and were well under way, Van opened his black case and set a vacuum-tube apparatus in operation. They were nearing the fringe of the glowing sea of red that was the vast blanket of moon weed. It now extended to within a few miles of Baltimore and stretched northward as far as the eye could see.

"It was a cinch," Van was explaining. "When I first saw that the growth slowed up under the arc-lights at Tomkins Cove it gave me the glimmering of an idea. Then, on the following day, when we learned that the weed spread more slowly in sunlight, I was convinced. The stuff is dormant on the moon, you know."

"Why?" Bart asked breathlessly.

"Because there is no atmosphere surrounding the moon, and the sun's rays are not filtered before they reach its surface as they are here. The invisible rays,

ultra-violet and such, are present in full proportion. And the moon weed can not flourish when subjected to light of the higher frequencies. It died out when the moon lost its atmosphere, and only revived on being brought to earth—probably a million times more prolific in our dense and damp atmosphere and rich soil. The thing's a cinch to dope out."

"Yeah!" Bart commented drily. Van was now talking and he could have bitten off his tongue for interrupting him.

This machine of Van's was a generator of invisible light in the ultra-indigo range, Van explained. You couldn't see its powerful beam, but they had proved in the laboratory that it was certain doom to the moon weed. They had grown the stuff from seed in steel cages, and played with it until they were all satisfied. Now would come the final test. Ten thousand planes were being equipped with the new generator, which was merely an adaptation of standard directional television transmitters, and to-night these would start out to fight the weed. It was a cinch!

Beneath them the red cauldron seethed and tossed as they sped northward; the crimson blanket of death that was steadily covering the country.

"Drop to a thousand feet, Bill," the scientist called, "and then watch below. But, don't slow down. We've got to get to Toronto!"

The ship nosed down and soon leveled off at the prescribed altitude. Van's vacuum tubes lighted to full brilliancy, and a black spot appeared on the glowing surface just beneath them, a black spot that extended into a streak as the plane continued on its way. They were cutting a swath of blackness fifty feet wide through the heart of the growth!

"See that!" Van gloated. "It's killing them by millions! And the best of it is the effect it leaves behind. The soil is permeated to a depth of several inches and the stuff will not germinate in the spots where the ray has contracted. Oh, it works to perfection!"

Bill was exuberant; his hopes revived miraculously. He gave his motor the gun and got out of it every last

revolution that it could turn up. He must get Van to Canada! Not such a bad idea, this going after Kelly, at that!

Bart was voluble in his praise, then caught himself short as he remembered that he had doubted Van but a half hour previously: doubted him and despaired. Now Van, lapsing into gloomy silence after his triumph, was again thinking of nothing but revenge. The getting of Dan Kelly meant more to him now than the extinction of the moon weed.

When they landed at the Toronto Airport they were welcomed with open arms instead of with rifle fire as Bill had anticipated. The news had gone forth. Already a thousand planes flying over the United States were driving back the sea of destruction. The invisible ray was a success, and the name of Carl Vanderventer was now a thing with which to conjure, rather than one on which to heap imprecation and insult. Van grimaced wryly at this last bit of news.

Danny Kelly? No one at the airport had ever heard of him. Van telephoned in to the city; to Police

Headquarters. Yes, they had apprehended the fugitive American at the request of Washington, but he was a slippery customer. He had escaped. Van raged and fumed.

Of what use were the congratulations of the night flyers who still loitered in the hangar; of what consolation the radio reports of the success of the ultra-indigo ray in the States and in Europe? He had come after his man and he'd failed. Defeat was a bitter pill.

The news broadcasts from the States were jubilant and became increasingly so during the night. The moon weed was being driven back on a wide front and by morning would be entirely surrounded. There would be no further loss of life and little more destruction of property. Carl Vanderventer had saved the day! Van grunted his disgust whenever an announcer mentioned his name.

When daylight came they prepared to return. Little use there was of searching the highways and byways of Canada for the fugitive. He'd simply have to wait

until the Canadians were able to get a line on Dan Kelly again.—It was maddening! But Bart was glad. The light of reason was returning to his friend's eyes in the reaction.

Then there was a telephone call from the city for Van. Police Headquarters wanted him. The fanatical glint returned to his eyes when he ran for the hangar to answer the call. Perhaps they had already captured Kelly! And he had an order in his pocket for the man's return to the States. He'd been made a deputy, and with Kelly released to him anything might happen. Something would happen.

But the police were reporting the unexplainable reappearance of the moon weed just outside the city limits at a point near Cookesville. Would Mr. Vanderventer be so kind as to fly over there and destroy it before any lives were lost? He would.

The growth had covered an acre of ground by the time they reached the spot designated. But it was the work of only a minute to blast it out of existence with the ultra-indigo ray. Van surveyed the blackened and

shriveled mass with satisfaction.

"Let's land and take a look at it," he said.

Bart thought he saw a look of exultation flash over his careworn features.

Soon they were wading deep in the blackened remains of the moon weed. The stems and tendrils snapped and crumbled into powder as they passed through. The stuff was done for, no question of that.

Bill Petersen yelled and pointed a shaking forefinger at an object that lay in the blackened ruin. It was a human skeleton, the bones bare of flesh and gleaming white in the light of the early morning sun. Van was on his knees, quick as a flash, feeling around the grewsome thing: pawing at the shreds of clothing that remained.

Then he was on his feet, his face shining with unholy glee. In his hands were a half dozen small, smooth objects which looked like pebbles. The diamonds!

"I thought so!" he exclaimed. "It's Kelly. Only way the seed could have gotten up here. He had some on his clothes and didn't know it. I couldn't get him myself—but anyway I'm satisfied."

He staggered and would have fallen, had not Bart caught him in his arms. Poor old Van! Nearly killed him, this thing had, but he'd be himself again, after it was all over. No wonder he'd gone out of his head with the horror of it, and the blame that had been so cruelly laid on him! No wonder he'd become obsessed with this idea of getting square with Dan Kelly! But now he was content: sleeping like a babe in Bart's arms.

Tenderly they carried him to the plane and laid him out on the cushions in back. They'd let him sleep as long as he could; return him to Washington where he'd receive his just dues in recognition for his services. Then would follow the work of reconstruction and rehabilitation. Van would glory in that.

Bart regarded his sleeping friend thoughtfully as they

winged their swift way toward the American border. The harsh lines that had showed in his face during the past few hours were smoothed away and in their place was an expression of deep contentment. He was at peace with the world once more. Good old Van.

What a difference there would be when he awakened to full realization of the changed order of things! What satisfaction and relief!

102 The Port of Missing Planes by Sterner St. Paul Meek

In the underground caverns of the Selom, Dr. Bird once again locks wills with the subversive genius, Saranoff.

Aproximate word count: 10,200

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

So that's the "Port of Missing Planes," mused Dick Purdy as he looked down over the side of his cockpit. "It looks wild and desolate all right, but at that I can't fancy a bus cracking up here and not being found pronto. Gosh, Wilder cracked in the wildest part of Arizona and he was found in a week."

The mail plane droned monotonously on through perfect flying weather. Purdy continued to study the ground. Recently transferred from a western run, he was getting his first glimpse of that section of ill

repute. Below him stretched a desolate, almost uninhabited stretch of country. By looking back he could see Bellefonte a few miles behind him, but Philipsburg, the next spot marked on his map, was not yet visible. Twelve hundred feet below him ran a silver line of water which his map told him was Little Moshannon Run. As[256] he watched he suddenly realized that the ground was not slipping by under him as rapidly as it should. He glanced at his air-speed meter.

"What the dickens?" he cried in surprise. For an hour his speed had remained almost constant at one hundred miles an hour. Without apparent cause it had dropped to forty, less than flying speed. He realized that he was falling. A glance at his altimeter confirmed the impression. The needle had dropped four hundred feet and was slowly moving toward sea-level.

With an exclamation of alarm, Purdy advanced his throttle until the three motors of his plane roared at full capacity. For a moment his air-speed picked up, but the gain was only momentary. As he watched, the

meter dropped to zero, although the propellers still whirled at top speed. His altimeter showed that he was gradually losing elevation.

He stood up and looked over the side of his plane. The ground below him was stationary as far as forward progress was concerned, but it was slowly rising to meet him. He fumbled at the release ring of his parachute but another glance at the ground made him hesitate. It was not more than three hundred feet below him.

"I must be dreaming!" he cried. The ground was no longer stationary. For some unexplained reason he was going backward. The motors were still roaring at top speed. Purdy dropped back into his seat in the cockpit. With his ailerons set for maximum lift he coaxed every possible revolution from his laboring motors. For several minutes he strained at the controls before he cast a quick glance over the side. His backward speed had accelerated and the ground was less than fifty feet below him. It was too close for a parachute jump.

"As slow as I'm falling, I won't crack much, anyway," he consoled himself. He reached for his switch and the roar of the motors died away in silence. The plane gave a sickening lurch backwards and down for an instant. Purdy again leaned over the side. He was no longer going either forward or back but was sinking slowly down. He looked at the ground directly under him. A cry of horror came from his lips. He sat back mopping his brow. Another glance over the side brought an expression of terror to his white face and he reached for the heavy automatic pistol which hung by the side of the control seat.

"He cleared Bellefonte at nine in the morning, Dr. Bird" said Inspector Dolan of the Post Office Department, "and headed toward Philipsburg. He never arrived. By ten we were alarmed and by eleven we had planes out searching for him. They reported nothing. He must have come to grief within a rather restricted area, so we sent search parties out at once. That was two weeks ago yesterday. No trace of either him or his plane has been found."

"The flying conditions were good?"

"Perfect. Also, Purdy is above suspicion. He has been flying the mail on the western runs for three years. This is his first accident. He was carrying nothing of unusual value."

"Are there any local conditions unfavorable to flying?"

"None at all. It is much uninhabited country, but there is no reason why it shouldn't be safe country to fly over."

"There are some damnably unfavorable local conditions, Doctor, although I can't tell you what they are," broke in Operative Carnes of the United States Secret Service. "Dick Purdy was rather more than[257] an acquaintance of mine. After he was lost I looked into the record of that section a little. It is known among aviators as 'The Port of Missing Planes.'"

"How did it get a name like that?"

"From the number of unexplained and unexplainable accidents that happen right there. Dugan of the air

mail, was lost there last May. They found the mailbags where he had dropped them before he crashed, but they never found a trace of him or his plane."

"They didn't?"

"Not a trace. The same thing happened when Mayfield cracked in August. He made a jump and broke his neck in landing. He was found all right, but his ship wasn't. Trierson of the army, dropped there and his plane was never found. Neither was he. He was seen to go down in a forced landing. He was flying last in a formation. As soon as he went down the other ships turned back and circled over the ground where he should have fallen. They saw nothing. Search parties found no trace of either him or his ship. Those are the best known cases, but I have heard rumors of several private ships which have gone down in that district and have never been seen or heard of since."

Dr. Bird sat forward with a glitter in his piercing black eyes. Carnes gave a grunt of satisfaction. He knew the meaning of that glitter. The Doctor's

interest had been fully aroused.

"Inspector Dolan," said Dr. Bird sharply, "why didn't you tell me those things?"

"Well, Doctor, we don't like to talk about mail wrecks any more than we have to. Of course, the loss of so many planes in one area is merely a coincidence. Probably the wrecked planes were stolen as souvenirs. Such things happen, you know."

"Fiddlesticks!" said Dr. Bird sharply. He raised one long slender hand with beautifully modeled tapering fingers and threw back his unruly mop of black hair. His square, almost rugged jaw, protruded and the glitter in his eyes grew in intensity. "No souvenir hunting vandals could cart away whole planes without leaving a trace. In that case, what became of the bodies? No, Inspector, this has gone beyond the range of coincidence. There is some mystery here and it needs looking into. Fortunately, my work at the Bureau of Standards is in such shape that I can safely leave it. I intend to devote my entire time to clearing this matter up. The ramifications may run deeper than

either you or I suspect. Please have all of your records dealing with plane disappearances or wrecks in that locality sent to my office at once."

The Post Office inspector stiffened.

"Of course, Dr. Bird," he said formally, "we are very glad to hear any suggestion that you may care to offer. When it comes, however, to a matter of surrendering control of a Post Office matter to the Department of Commerce or to the Treasury Department, I doubt the propriety. Our records are confidential ones and are not open to everyone who is curious. I will inform the proper authorities of your desire to help, but I doubt seriously if they will avail themselves of your offer."

Dr. Bird's black eyes shot fire. "Idiot!" he said. "If you're a specimen of the Post Office Department, I'll have the entire case taken out of your hands. Do you mean to cooperate with me or not?"

"I fail to see what interest the Bureau of Standards can have in the affair."

"The Bureau isn't mixed up in it; Dr. Bird is. If necessary, I will go direct to the President. Oh, thunder![258] What's the use of talking to you? Who's your chief?"

"Chief Inspector Watkins is in charge of all investigations."

"Carnes, get him on the telephone. Tell him we are taking charge of the investigation. If he balks, have Bolton go over his head. Then get the chief of the Air Corps on the wire and arrange for an army plane tomorrow. There is something more than a mail robbery back of this or I'm badly fooled."

"Do you suspect—"

"I suspect nothing and no one, Carnes—yet! I'll get a few instruments together to take with us to-morrow. We'll fly over that section until something happens if it takes us until this time next year."

A three-seated scout plane rose from Langley Field at eight the next morning. Captain Garland was at the

controls. In the rear cockpit sat Dr. Bird and Carnes. Inside his flying helmet, the doctor wore a pair of headphones which were connected to a box on the floor before him. Carnes carried no apparatus but his hand rested carelessly on the grip of a machine-gun.

The plane cleared Bellefonte at nine-thirty and bore east toward Philipsburg. Captain Garland kept his eyes on his instrument board and on a map. Less than six hundred feet above the ground, he was following the air-mail route as exactly as possible. Overhead a mail plane winged its way east, three thousand feet above them.

Fifteen minutes brought them to Philipsburg. Captain Garland shot his plane upward a few hundred feet.

"Turn back, Captain," said Dr. Bird into the speaking tube. "Retrace your course a quarter of a mile farther north. At Bellefonte, turn back and go over the same ground another quarter of a mile north. Keep flying back and forth, working your way north, until I tell you to stop."

The plane swung around and headed back toward Bellefonte.

"Of course, we can't tell exactly what route he followed," said the doctor to Carnes, "but he was new on this run and it is safe to assume that he didn't stray far. We'll quarter the whole area before we stop."

Carnes watched the ground below them carefully. There was nothing about it to distinguish it from any other wooded mountainous country and his interest waned. He glanced aloft. The mail plane had disappeared in the distance and the sky was clear of aircraft. He turned again to the ground. It looked closer than it had before. He turned and looked at the duplicate altimeter. The plane had lost nearly a hundred feet elevation.

"There's something wrong about this plane, Doctor," came Captain Garland's voice through the speaking tube. "It doesn't behave like it should."

"I guess we've found what we were looking for,

Carnes," said Dr. Bird grimly. "What seems to be the matter, Captain?"

"Blessed if I know," was the answer. "It feels like a drag of some sort, like an automobile going through heavy sand. We're slowing down, though I am giving her all the gun I've got!"

"Cut your motor!" said the doctor shortly. He bent over the duplicate instrument board as the roar of the motor died away. Carnes rose and looked over the side.

"Look, Doctor!" he cried in a strained voice. Directly below them yawned a hole sixty feet in diameter and extending down into the bowels of the earth. The plane hovered over the hole for a moment and then slowly descended into it.

"What is it?" cried the detective.

"It's the secret of the Port of [259] Missing Planes," replied Dr. Bird. "Throw off your parachute. Keep your gun and light handy but don't fire unless I do

first. The same holds good for you, Captain."

The plane sunk until it was fifty feet below the level of the ground. Carnes looked up. Gradually the circle of sky became blurred and hazy as though the air were heavy with dust. The rasp of Dr. Bird's flashlight key aroused him and he hastily wound his own. The haze above them grew thicker. Suddenly the light died and then came darkness, a darkness so thick and absolute that it bore down on them like a weight. Dr. Bird's light stabbed a path through it.

They were in a tunnel or tube reaching into the ground. The sides were smooth and polished, as though water worn. The plane sank deeper and deeper into the earth. Suddenly Dr. Bird's light went out.

"What's the matter, Doctor?" asked Carnes, "did your light fail?"

"No," came a strained voice. "I turned it out."

"Why?"

"I don't know. Light yours."

Carnes reached into his pocket. Dr. Bird could hear his breath come in panting sobs as though he were exerting his whole strength.

"I can't do it, Doctor," he gasped. "I want to, but some power greater than my will prevents me."

"Are you affected, Captain?" asked the Doctor.

"I—can't—move," came in muffled accents from the front cockpit.

"Some power beyond my knowledge has us in its grasp," said the doctor. "All we can do is sit tight and see what happens. We are no longer falling at any rate."

From the forward cockpit came a rustling sound. There was a slight jar in the ship, and it gave as though a weight had been applied to one side.

"What are you doing, Garland?" asked the doctor

sharply.

There was no reply. Again came the rustling sound. The ship gave a sudden lurch as though a weight had left the side. Carnes suddenly spoke.

"Good-by, Doctor," he said. "I'm going over the side."

"I have been fighting it but I'm going myself in a minute," replied the doctor grimly. "Something is pulling me over. It's the same power that keeps me from turning on my light."

"It's perfectly safe to go over," said Carnes suddenly. "The plane is resting on a solid base."

"I have the same feeling. Catch hold of my belt and let's go."

They climbed over the side of the plane and dropped to the ground. Their descent made absolutely no sound. Dr. Bird stopped and felt the floor.

"Crepe rubber, or something of the sort," he

murmured. "At any rate, it's noise and vibration proof."

"Now what?" asked Carnes.

"This way," replied the doctor confidently. "I'm beginning to get the hang of understanding this. The way is perfectly level and open before us. Keep your hand on my shoulder and step right out."

"How do you know where we're going?"

"I don't, but something tells me that the road is level and open. It is the same thing that brought us over the side. I can't explain it but it is some sort of a telepathic control exerted by an intelligence. Whether the sending mind is reinforced by instruments I don't know, but I rather fancy not."

"Where is Garland?"

"He went off in another direction. I could feel the power that guided him although it was not directed at us. Something tells me that he is safe for the

present."[260]

For half a mile they made their way through the darkness before they stopped. This time Carnes could plainly understand the command which came to both of them.

"There is a table before us," said Dr. Bird. "Lay your flashlight and pistol on it."

Carnes struggled against the order but the power guiding him was stronger than his will. He strove to turn on his light. When he could not, he tried to cock his pistol. With a sigh, he laid his gun and light on the table before him. Without words, the two men walked forward a few feet and sat confidently down on a bench that something told them was there.

For a moment they sat quietly. A cry, choked in the middle, came from the detective's throat. Cold clammy hands touched his face. He strove again to cry out, but his voice was paralyzed. The hands went methodically over his body, evidently searching for weapons. Mustering up his will, Carnes made a grab

for one of them. His captor apparently had no objection to the detective's action for Carnes seized the hand without effort. But he almost dropped it. The hand was as large as a ham. He reached for the other hand but could not locate it. A movement on the part of his captor brought it to him and he made the startling discovery that the palms were directed outward. The hand had only four fingers, which were armed with long curved claws instead of nails. Carnes ran his hand up the palm to search for a thumb but found none. He found, however, that, while the hands were naked, the wrists were covered with short thick fur.

"Doctor!" he cried, "there's—"

Again came the overpowering will and his speech died away in silence. He sat dumb and motionless while his captor moved over to Dr. Bird. A second animal came forward and felt the detective over. He was not allowed to move this time, nor was he while a third and fourth animal went carefully over him. The four drew back some distance.

"Doctor," whispered Carnes as the influence grew fainter.

"Shh!" was the answer, and as the doctor's demand for silence was reinforced by another wave of the paralyzing power, Carnes had no choice. As he sat there silent, the power which held him again seemed to grow less. He found that he could move his arms slightly. He edged forward to get his gun and light. Before he reached them, a beam of light split the darkness. Dr. Bird stood, electric torch in hand, staring before him.

At a distance of a few feet stood a group of half a dozen animals about the height of a man as they stood erect on their short hind legs. They were covered with heavy brown fur. Their lower limbs were thin and light, but their shoulders and forelegs were heavy and powerful. Their forepaws, which had the palms facing outward, were armed with the long wicked claws he had felt. No visible ears protruded from the round skulls. Their heads appeared to rest between their shoulders, so short were their necks. Their muzzles were long and obtusely pointed.

Through grinning jaws could be seen powerful white teeth.

"Talpidae!" cried Dr. Bird. "Carnes, they are a race of giant intellectual moles!"

Despite the fact that they had no visible eyes, the creatures were strongly affected by the light. They dropped on all fours and turned their backs to the scientist and the detective. Two of them scurried away down a long tunnel which opened from the room in which they stood. Dr. Bird turned his light up and swept the room. It was[261] roughly circular, a hundred feet in diameter, with a roof ten feet high. Dozens of tunnels led off in every direction.

"Your light, Carnes, quick!" cried the doctor in a strained voice. Carnes reached toward the table for his light. Before he could reach it he was frozen into immobility. From the corner of his eye he could watch the doctor. Dr. Bird was struggling to bring the light back on the moles which stood before them. Great beads of sweat stood out on his forehead. Inch by inch he moved the light closer to his goal, but Carnes

could see that his thumb was stealing up toward the switch button. His breath came in sobs. Suddenly the light went out.

For some time the two men sat motionless on the bench unable to speak or move. One of the moles stepped before them and gave a mental command. The two rose to their feet. For a mile or more they followed their guide, then, at a silent command, they turned to the right for a few steps and stopped. In another moment, the numbing influence had departed.

"Are you all right, Carnes?"

"Yes, right as can be. Doctor, what were those things? Where are we? What's it all about?"

"We'll find out in time, I guess," replied the doctor with a chuckle. "Carnes, isn't this the darnedest thing we've ever been through? Captured half a mile underground by a race of giant talpidae before whose mental orders we are as helpless as children. Did you understand any of their talk?"

"Talk? I didn't hear any."

"Well, mental conversation then. They made no sound."

"No. All I understood was the orders I obeyed."

I got a great deal of it," the doctor said. "We are evidently in or near a sort of central community of these fellows. They spoke; thought is a better word; they thought of doing away with us but decided to wait until they consulted someone with more authority. You see, we are not airplane pilots. Captain Garland was taken at once to the place where they have other aviators imprisoned."

"What do they want of pilots underground?"

"I couldn't quite get that. There was another thought that I am not sure that I interpreted correctly. If I did, there is some man of the upper world down here in a position of considerable authority among them. He has some use for pilots, but what use, I don't know. We are to be held until he is consulted."

"Who could it be?"

"I can only think of one man. Carnes, and I hope I'm wrong. I don't have to name him."

"You mean—?"

"Ivan Saranoff. We haven't heard of him or had any activity from him for the last eight months. We know that he had a subterranean borer with which he has penetrated deep into the earth. Isn't it possible that he has, at some time in his explorations, come into contact with these fellows and made friends with them?"

"It's possible, Doctor, but I hoped we had killed him when we destroyed his borer."

"So did I, but he seems to bear a charmed life. Several times we have thought him dead, only to have him show up with some new form of devil's work. It is too much to hope that we have succeeded in doing away with him. Did you notice one thing? Those fellows were helpless while I held the light on them."

The one which was holding us captive got so interested in the discussion about our fate that he momentarily forgot us. That was when I got my light. Until I turned the light away from them, we were free men."[262]

"That's right," answered the secret service man.

"Remember that. The next time we get a light on a bunch of them, hold them in the beam until we can make terms."

"If we ever get hold of a light again."

"I have a light they didn't get, probably because I didn't think of it while they were around. It is one of those fountain pen battery affairs and they probably took it for a pen. I won't turn it on now, partly to save it and partly not to let them know we have it. Let's see what our prison is like."

They felt their way around the room. It proved to be eight paces by ten in size. Like the tunnels it was floored with crepe rubber or some similar substance

which gave out no sound of footsteps, yet was firm underfoot. The room was furnished with two beds, a table and two chairs. There was no sign of a door.

"That's that," exclaimed the doctor when they had finished their exploration. "I'm hungry. I wonder when we eat. Hello, here comes one of the fellows now."

Carnes made no reply. As the doctor's speech ended, a wave of mental power enveloped the room. One of the moles entered, moved over to the table for an instant and then left the room. An earthly odor of vegetables pervaded the room.

"My question is answered," said the doctor. "We eat now."

He moved to the table. On it had been placed dishes containing three different types of roots. Two of them proved to be palatable, but the third was woody and bitter. The prisoners made a hearty meal from the two they relished. For an hour they sat waiting.

"Here they come again!" exclaimed the doctor. "We

are going before the person I spoke of. Can't you get their thoughts?"

"No, I can't, Doctor. I can understand when I get a command, but aside from those times everything is a blank to me."

"My mental wave receiver, if that's what it is, must be attuned to a different frequency than yours, for I can hear them talking to one another. I guess I should say that I can feel them thinking to one another. At any rate, they want us to follow. Come along, the road will be open and level."

The doctor stepped out confidently with Carnes at his heels. For half a mile they went forward. Presently they halted.

"We are in a big chamber here, Carnes," whispered the doctor, "and there is someone before us. We'll have some light in a minute."

His prophecy was soon fulfilled. A vague glimmer of light began to fill the cavern in which they stood. As it

grew stronger they could see a raised dais before them on which were seated three figures. Two of them were the giant moles. Each of the moles wore a helmet which covered his head completely, with no sign of lenses or other means of vision. It was the central figure, however, which held the attention of the prisoners.

Seated on a chair and regarding them with an expression of sardonic amusement was a man. Above a high forehead rose a thin scrub of white hair. Keen brown eyes peered at them from under almost hairless brows. The nose was high bridged and aquiline and went well with his prominent cheekbones. His mouth was a mere gash below his nose, framed by thin bloodless lips. The lips were curled in a sneer, revealing yellow teeth. The whole expression of the face was one of revolting cruelty.

"So," said the figure slowly, "fate has been kind to me. My friends, Dr. Bird and Operative Carnes have[263] chosen to pay me a long visit. I am greatly flattered."

The thin metallic voice with its noticeable accent

struck a familiar chord.

"Saranoff!" gasped Carnes.

"Yes, Mr. Carnes, Saranoff. Professor Ivan Saranoff, of the faculty of St. Petersburg once. Now merely Saranoff, the scourge of the bourgeois."

"I hoped we had killed you," murmured Carnes.

"It was no fault of Dr. Bird's that he failed," replied the Russian with an excess of malevolence in his voice. "His method was a correct one. Merely the fortuitous fact that we had just pierced one of the tunnels of the Selom, and I was away from my borer exploring it, saved me. You did me a good turn, Doctor, without meaning to. You destroyed an instrument on which I had relied. In doing so, you unwittingly delivered into my hands a power greater than any I had dreamed of—the Selom."

"What can a mental cripple like you do with blind allies like them?" asked Dr. Bird with a contemptuous laugh. The Russian half rose from his seat in rage. For

a moment his hand toyed with a switch before him. The sardonic sneer came back into his face and he dropped back into his seat.

"You nearly provoked me to destroy you, Doctor," he said, "but cold calculation saved you. Since you will never return to the upper world, save when and as I decree, I have no objection to telling you. The Selom are not blind. Their eyes are under the skin as is the case with many of the talpidae, but for all that they can see very well. Their eyes function on a shorter wave than ours, a wave so short that it readily penetrates through miles of earth and rock. This cavern is now flooded with it. Visible light, the light by which we see, is limited to their eyes, hence the helmets which you see. They can see through those helmets as well as you or I can see through air."

"What do you intend to do with us?"

"Ah, Doctor, there you hit me in a tender spot. I have a sore temptation to close this switch on which my hand rests. Were I to do so, both you and Mr. Carnes would vanish forevermore. I have, however, conceived

a very real affection for you two. Your brains, Doctor, working in my behalf instead of against me would render me well-nigh omnipotent. Mr. Carnes has a certain low cunning which I can also use to advantage. Both of you will join me."

"You might as well close your switch and save your breath, Saranoff, for we will do nothing of the sort," replied the doctor sharply.

"Ah, but you will. So will Mr. Carnes. I had no hopes that you would join me willingly. In fact, I am pleased that you do not. I could never trust you. All the same, you will join my forces as have the others whom I have brought into the hands of the Selom. I have ways of accomplishing my desires. It pleases my fancy, Doctor, to use your brains in aiding me in my scientific developments. You will enjoy working with the scientists of the Selom. Among them you will find brains which excel any to be found on the surface of the earth, since we two are below. Already I have learned much from them. You, Mr. Carnes shall be taught to pilot an airplane. When my cohorts go forth from the realms of the Selom to establish the rule of

Russia, you will be piloting one of the planes. Your first task will be to learn to fly."

"I refuse to do anything of the sort!" said Carnes.

"I will not be ready to have your flying lessons started until to-morrow,"[264] replied the Russian, "and you will have until then to reconsider your rash decision. It will be much easier for you if you obey my orders. If you still refuse to-morrow, you will pay a visit to the laboratory of the Selom. When you return your lessons will be started. You will now be taken to your cell. I have use for Dr. Bird this afternoon."

"I won't leave Dr. Bird and that's flat!" exclaimed Carnes. Dr. Bird interrupted him.

"Go ahead, Carnesy, old dear," he said lightly. "You might just as well toddle along under your own power as to be dragged along. You have a day for reflection, in any event. I daresay I'll see you again before they do anything to you."

Carnes glanced keenly at the doctor's face. What he

saw evidently reassured him for he turned without a word and walked away. The light grew gradually dimmer until darkness again reigned in the cavern.

"Come, Doctor," said Saranoff's voice. "We have work to do."

Carnes sat alone in his cell for hours. The darkness and loneliness wore on him until he felt that his nerves would crack. Not a sound came to him. He threw himself on one of the beds and plugged his ears with his finger tips in an attempt to keep the silence out. Then a cheerful voice sounded in the cell and a friendly hand fell on his shoulder.

"Well, Carnesy, old dear," said Dr. Bird, "have you been lonesome?"

"Dr. Bird!" gasped Carnes in tones of relief. "Are you all right?"

"Right as can be. I learned a lot this afternoon. For one thing, you're going to start flying lessons tomorrow and you're going to do your best to become

an expert pilot in a short time. It is the only thing to do."

"And fly a plane for Saranoff?"

"I hope not. The only way to avoid that very thing is to keep your mentality unimpaired so that I can call on you for help when I need it. If the Selom operate on you, you will be useless to me."

"Operate? What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you. The Selom are a very old and highly civilized people. For ages they have possessed scientific knowledge for which the upper-world scientists are now blindly groping. Among other things, they have a perfect knowledge of the workings of the brain. If they operate they will remove from your brain every speck of memory you have of past events, leaving only those things that will be useful to Saranoff. You will be his complete slave. In that condition you will be taught to fly a plane. When the time comes, you will fly one with no remembrance of anything which happened prior to the operation and

with no will but his. It will be easier to teach you flying in your natural state if you are willing. You will be willing."

"If you wish it, Doctor."

"I do wish it, most decidedly," Dr. Bird went on. "Obey every order they give you. You will find that the Selom are an enlightened and civilized race. They are very kindly and would willingly harm no one."

"Then why have they taken up with Saranoff?"

"He is the first man with whom they have come into contact. He has told them a horrible tale of conditions on the surface, and they have swallowed it, hook, line and sinker. They believe that he is going to establish a new order of happiness and plenty for all with the aid of his gang of cutthroats from Russia. If they had the slightest inkling of the true state of affairs, they would turn on him in an instant."

"Why don't you tell them?"

"Remember that I am a stranger here and he has poisoned their minds[265] against me. Although the mind of an ordinary men is an open book to them, they cannot read Saranoff's secret thoughts against his will. They can't read mine either, for that matter. I am working in the laboratory and I will pick up a great deal. When the time comes, we will strike for our liberty and for the safety of the world."

"Did you learn Saranoff's plans?"

"Yes. He is gathering planes and pilots in the underground caverns of the Selom. When he gets enough, he will bring men from Russia to man the planes. What could the United States, or the world for that matter, do against a fleet of hundreds, possibly thousands, of the best planes equipped with deadly weapons unknown to their science? That menace confronts us and we must remove it. To give you some idea of the power of the Selom, this afternoon Saranoff and I with one assistant opened a cavern in the solid rock three miles long and a mile wide and over six hundred feet in height."

"Three men! How on earth did you do it?"

"Two men and one mole. We did it with a ray, the secret of which only the Selom and Saranoff know."

"You have told me a disintegrating ray is an impossibility," objected Carnes.

"It is. This was not a disintegrating ray. Carnes, either I am crazy or the Selom have solved the secret of time, the fourth dimension. I haven't been able to grasp the whole thing yet. What I think we did was to remove that rock a distance, perhaps only a millionth of a second, forward or back into time. At any rate it ceased to exist, yet they can bring it back unchanged at will. That was the way they captured our plane. They sent out a magnetic ray of such power that it stopped our plane in midair and brought it to the ground. They removed the rock from beneath us and lowered us into the hole. By reversing the process they restored things to their original condition. All of these tunnels and rooms were made in that way."

"I still don't understand how they did it."

"I don't either, but I hope to in time. Now let's go to bed. It's late. To-morrow you will start your lessons with Captain Garland as an instructor. He won't know you for he was operated on this afternoon. Do your best to become a pilot. When I get ready, I want you with me in full possession of all your faculties."

The next morning the two prisoners separated and went to their duties. In the cavern which Dr. Bird had described, Captain Garland was waiting beside the plane he had flown. He did not know Carnes, but he still knew how to fly. Declining to enter into any conversation, he started expounding the theory of flying to the detective. Carnes remembered Dr. Bird's words and applied himself wholeheartedly. For four hours they worked together. At the end of that time the light faded in the cavern and Carnes was led by an unseen guide back to his cell. He threw himself on a bed and awaited Dr. Bird's return.

"I have learned a few more things about the Selom," said the doctor when he entered the cell several hours later. "We are in their largest community. They have cities or warrens scattered all over the world.

Each city has its own ruler, but the whole race are ruled by an overlord or king who habitually lives here. He is away visiting a community under northern Africa just now, but he will be back in a few days. The Selom are sincere in their desire to help the upper world. They feel great pity for mankind in view of the conditions Saranoff has described to them. When the king returns.[266] I plan to make a direct appeal to him. In the meantime, go on with your flying lessons. How did you make out to-day?"

The second day was a repetition of the first, as were the third and fourth. A week passed before Dr. Bird entered the cell in evident excitement.

"Has Hanac brought our evening food yet?" he asked anxiously.

"No, Doctor."

"Good. Take this light. As soon as he enters throw the light full on him and hold him until I work on him. We've got to make our escape."

"Why?"

"The king is due back to-morrow. Saranoff is frightened at the good impression I have made on the Selom. He is supreme in the monarch's absence, so he plans to operate on both of us before he returns. He is afraid to allow me to see the king with an unimpaired intellect and memory. Shh! Here comes Hanac." The door to their cell opened noiselessly. When the mole who brought their food was well inside, Carnes turned on the tiny flashlight. The mole dropped on all fours and tried to turn its back. Dr. Bird sprang forward. For an instant his slim muscular fingers worked on the mole's neck and shoulders. Silently the animal sank in a heap.

"Come on, Carnes," cried the doctor. "Turn off the light."

"Did you kill him, Doctor?" asked Carnes as he raced down a pitch dark corridor at the scientist's heels.

"No, I merely paralyzed him temporarily. He'll be all right in a day or so. Turn here."

For ten minutes they ran down corridor after corridor. Carnes soon lost all track of direction, but Dr. Bird never hesitated. Presently he slowed down to a walk.

"It's a good thing I have a good memory," he said. "I planned that course out from a map, and I had to memorize every turn and distance of it. We are now behind your flying hall and away from any of the regular dwellings of the Selom. Straight west about four miles is one of the time-ray machines with a guard over it. Aside from them, there isn't a mole between here and Detroit."

"What are we going to do, Doctor?"

"Keep out of their way and avoid recapture if we can. If we merely wanted to escape we would try to get possession of that time-ray machine and open a road to the surface. However, I am not content with that. I want to stay underground until Astok, their king, returns. When he comes, we will surrender to him."

"Suppose they operate without giving us a chance to present our side of the affair."

"If they do, Saranoff wins; but they won't. The more I have seen of the Selom, the more impressed I am by their sense of justice. They'll give us a hearing, all right, and a fair one."

For two hours the doctor led the way. At the end of that time he stopped.

"We've gone as far as we need to," he said. "They'll undoubtedly send out searching parties, but if we can avoid thinking they won't be able to find us. The tunnels are a perfect labyrinth. If you care to sleep, go to it. We'll be safer sleeping than awake, for we won't be sending out thoughts so fast."

Dr. Bird threw himself down on the rubber floor of the tunnel and was soon asleep. Carnes tried to follow his example, but sleep would not come to him. Frantically he tried to think of nothing. By an effort he would sit for a few minutes with his mind a conscious blank, but thoughts would throng in in spite of[267] him. Time and again he brought himself up with a jerk and forced his mind to become a blank. The hours passed slowly. Carnes grew cramped from long immobility

and rose. A sudden thought intruded itself into his mind. "I might as well throw that light away," he murmured to himself. "It will be no good now. The Selom won't hurt us if they do catch us."

He reached in his pocket for the light. He was about to hurl it from him when a moment of sanity came to him. He stared about. The impulse to hurl the light away came stronger. He strove in vain to turn it on.

"Doctor!" he cried suddenly. "Wake up! They're after us!"

With a bound, Dr. Bird was on his feet.

"The light!" he cried. "Where is it?"

"In—my—hand," murmured Carnes with stiffening lips.

Dr. Bird seized the light. A beam stabbed the darkness. Less than fifty feet from them stood two moles. As the light flashed on Carnes regained control of himself.

"Take the light, Carnes," snapped the doctor. "I've got to put these fellows to sleep."

Slowly he advanced toward the motionless Selom. He had almost reached them when the light flickered out. He turned and raced at full speed toward the detective. Carnes was standing rigid and motionless. Dr. Bird took the light from his hand. Despite the almost overpowering drag on his mind, he managed to turn it on. He swung the beam around in a circle. Besides the two Selom he had seen before, the light revealed a pair standing behind him. As the light struck them, the numbing influence vanished for an instant from the doctor's mind. He moved a step forward and then halted. The moles behind him were hurling waves of mental power at him. Again the light cleared him for an instant, but he got a brief glance of other moles hurrying from every direction.

"The jig's up, I guess," he muttered. He strove to free himself by the use of his light, but the tiny battery had done its duty, and gradually the light grew dimmer. The influence grew too strong for him. With a sigh he shut off the feeble ray and hurled the light from him.

The moles closed in.

"All right," said the doctor audibly. "We'll go peaceably."

As he spoke the paralyzing power was withdrawn. With Carnes at his side he retraced the route he had taken from the cell. Before they reached it they turned off. Dr. Bird realized that they were treading the familiar path to the laboratory.

Outside the laboratory the Selom halted. A wave of mental power enveloped the prisoners and they remained silent and motionless while their escort withdrew. From the laboratory came three of the Selom scientists. As the laboratory door opened they could see that it was bathed in a flood of light, and that the moles wore helmets covering their heads. They moved inside. Clad in a white gown stood Saranoff.

"So, my friends, you would run away and leave me, would you?" gloated the Russian. "And just when I had planned a very beneficial operation for you! I will

remove permanently from your brains all the delusions which now encumber them, and for your own puny wills I will substitute my own."

The power which had held the prisoners silent disappeared.

"You have caught us, Saranoff," said Dr. Bird. "I know the power you wield and that you are making no idle boast. I appeal, however, to these others, my friends. The operation[268] you are planning to perform is not a routine one. It is one that should have the sanction of the king before it is done. I appeal from you to him."

"He is far away," laughed Saranoff. "When he returns, your plea will be presented to him, but it will be too late to do you any good. You are right, Doctor—I do not plan a mere routine operation. Not only will I remove your memory, but I'm going to use the time-ray on you and banish forever into the unknown a portion of your brains. Without knowing which adjustment I make of the infinite number possible, no one, not even the king, can ever recall it."

Dr. Bird turned to the Selom scientists and hurled his thoughts at them.

"This man intends to commit a horrible crime," he thought, "and one which he has no authority to perform. To you I appeal for justice. Bid him wait until Astok returns, and let him be the judge as to whether it shall be done. Jumor, you know me well. You know that my brain is the equal of one of the Selom. Even you cannot read my thoughts against my will. Are you willing to see that brain destroyed? Astok will be here soon and nothing will be lost by a short delay."

"He thinks truly," was the answering thought of Jumor. "It would be better to wait."

"We will not wait," crashed Saranoff's thought into their consciousness. "He killed Hanac when he escaped, and his punishment shall be as I have decreed. Did not the king give me full power while he was away?"

"It is true that he ordered us to obey this man in all things dealing with upper-world men," thought Jumor.

"If it is true that he killed Hanac his punishment is doubtless just."

"I did not kill Hanac," returned the doctor. "He is paralyzed and will be all right in a few hours, if he isn't already. I demand that you wait until Astok returns. When an appeal is made to him, no other may judge. So says the Selom law."

"That is true," replied Jumor. "We will wait until the king returns."

"We will not wait," came Saranoff's thought. "The king delegated to me his powers during his absence, as far as all the world, save the Selom, were concerned. Were it one of the Selom appealing to the king, I would be powerless before the appeal. These are not bound by Selom law and are not entitled to its benefits. We will operate at once."

"Then you will operate alone," retorted Jumor. "I will not assist you."

"I need none of your help," thought Saranoff. "Asmo

and Camol, will you help me? If you refuse I will report to Astok that you have disobeyed and defied his chosen delegate."

"We had better assist him, Jumor," thought Asmo. "Astok did delegate his authority. I am not of the nobility and I dare not refuse to help."

"Suit yourself, Asmo," replied Jumor. "I refuse to assist, and will appeal to Astok against him."

The third mole hesitated.

"You are higher in rank than we are, Jumor," he thought at length, "and like Asmo, I dare not resist him. I heard the king give this upper-earth man his authority while he was away. I will assist."

"And I will leave the room," retorted Jumor.

He moved to a door and threw it open. At the threshold he paused and sent back a final thought.

"I will appeal to Astok, our ruler. I will send now a

message to him to hurry home that he may judge between us."[269]

The door closed behind him. Saranoff chuckled audibly.

"Good-by, Carnes," said Dr. Bird sadly. "This devil can do all he says he can, and more. I'm sorry I brought you and Garland into this mess."

"Oh, well, it can't be helped, Doctor," replied the detective with an attempt at cheerfulness. "What is he going to do to us?"

"He'll have to use instruments for what he plans," said the doctor. "Ordinarily a routine mental operation is performed without the use of extraneous power. The mind of the operator is electrically connected to the mind of the victim. By means of thought waves the operator banishes from the mind of the subject such portions of his memory and mentality as he chooses. He may then substitute other things in place of what he has removed. Any of the Selom could operate on you, but I doubt whether Jumor himself could do it

successfully on me without aid from power. Here come the instruments."

Asmo and Camol took from a cabinet on the side of the wall what looked like a cloth helmet. Attached to it were a dozen wires which they connected to a box on a table. The box was made of crystal and inside it could be seen a number of vacuum tubes and coils of various designs. Other leads ran to a similar helmet which Asmo placed on Saranoff's head. A heavy cable ran to a switch on the wall.

As Camol closed the switch the tubes in the box began to glow with weird lights. Violet, green and orange streamers of light came from them to dance in wild patterns on the laboratory walls. For five minutes Saranoff made adjustments to dials on the front of the crystal box. The colored lights died away and a gentle golden glow came from the apparatus. He threw off the helmet.

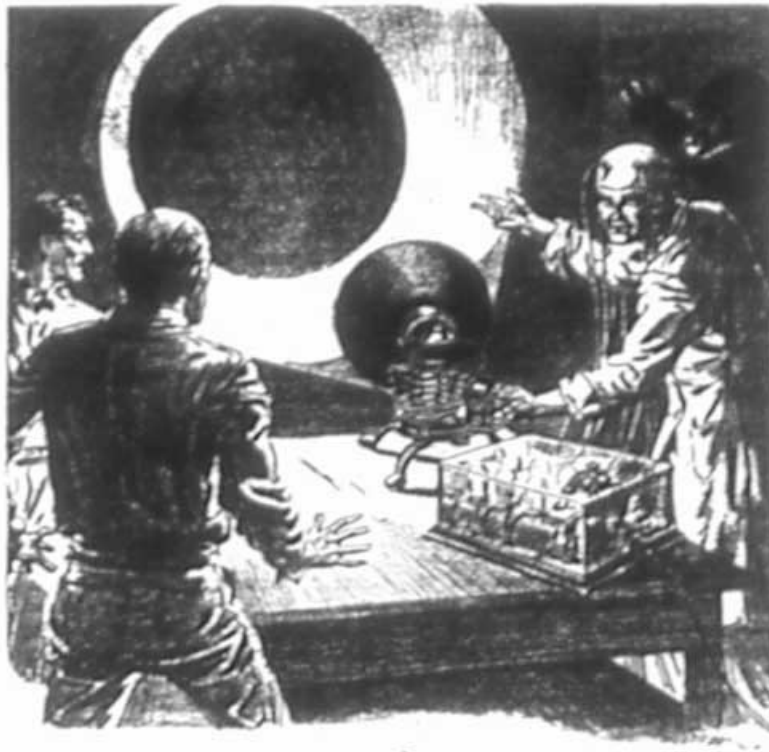
Camol left the laboratory and returned with a large coil on the top of which was mounted a parabolic reflector. A device like a clock on the front of the coil

was constantly marking the passage of time. The dial had two indicators which were together. Saranoff chuckled.

"You may not have seen this device work, Doctor," he said. "In order to let you know what you are facing, I will demonstrate."

He turned the reflector so that it bore on the wall. He adjusted the moving dial so that the two indicators were no longer together. As he closed a switch, the wall before the reflector vanished. Saranoff turned off the power.

"That portion of the wall has gone back in time exactly three seconds," he announced. "As far as the present is concerned, it has ceased to exist. It is following us through time three seconds behind us, but in all eternity it will never catch up unless I aid it. Since the exact time is known, it can be restored. If I were to alter this adjustment ever so little, it could never be recalled. Watch me."



He again closed the switch, this time in a reverse direction. The wall instantly filled up as it had been before. He moved the time dial so that the two indicators coincided.

"After I have sent a portion of your physical brain into the past or the future as the fancy strikes me, I will change the adjustment of that dial. Since there are an infinite number of adjustments to which I might have set it, the chances that any one could ever duplicate my setting and restore it are the complement of

infinity, or zero," he said. "I am now ready to remove your memory. If the impossible should happen and your physical brain be restored it would be useless. Asmo, adjust the helmet. I will operate on my friend, the Doctor, first."[270]

Carnes strove to rush to Dr. Bird's assistance, but he was helpless before the force of Camol's will. Asmo adjusted the helmet to Dr. Bird's head and buckled it firmly in place. With an evil grin, Saranoff donned the other helmet.

"Good-by, Dr. Bird," he said mockingly. "You will continue to see me, but you won't know me, except as your master."

His hand reached for the switch. It had almost closed on it when Saranoff stopped convulsively. He sat motionless while the laboratory door opened and Jumor entered the room. He was followed by another mole. The newcomer was fully six inches taller than the others. His head was hidden by a helmet, but around his arms he wore strings of sparkling jewels.

"Ivan Saranoff, what means this?" his powerful thoughts dominated the room.

"I was merely engaged in rectifying some of the mental errors of this man of the upper earth," explained the Russian eagerly. "It is merely a routine operation such as you gave me authority to perform."

"An operation which uses power is not routine," replied the king. "I am told that this upper-earth man has a brain equal to those of my most advanced scientist. I am also told that you planned to do more than rectify his mental errors."

"You have been falsely informed. I was merely about to adjust his memory."

"Then what means this?" The king pointed to the time-ray machine.

"That was brought here in order that it could be used when you returned," thought the Russian eagerly.

"This upper-earth man killed Hanac when he brought him food."

The door opened and Hanac entered.

"Oh, Astok," objected Hanac's thoughts, "when these upper-earth men had me at their mercy, with a light, they spared me. They paralyzed me for a time so that they might escape but they did it in such a manner that no harm came to me."

"So Jumor told me," replied the king. "Release them."

In an instant Carnes was on his feet removing the helmet from Dr. Bird's head. The doctor struggled to his feet.

"Dr. Bird," thought the king, "can you communicate with me easily?"

"Yes, Your Majesty, but may I ask that you alter the vibration period of my comrade, Mr. Carnes? He cannot understand you with his present low period."

The king stepped to the box with which Saranoff had been working. In response to his commands the helmet which had been on Dr. Bird's head was placed

on the detective. The king made a few adjustments to the dials and signalled for the helmet to be removed.

"Can you understand me, Mr. Carnes?" he asked mentally.

The question leaped with startling clearness into the detective's head. Carefully he framed his answer.

"I can understand you," said the king. "I will now sit in judgment on the appeal made to me. Dr. Bird tell me your story."

With eloquent thoughts, Dr. Bird poured forth the history of the upper world. He told of the great war and the collapse of the Russian monarchy. He traced history to the fall of the moderate party and the rise of the Bolsheviki. He described the horrible conditions existing in Russia. At the end he reviewed the long battle he and Carnes had fought against Saranoff. When he had finished, the king questioned Carnes.

The detective repeated the story in different words

and the king turned to Saranoff. From the Russian's mind came a tissue of distorted facts and downright lies. He denied[271] or twisted around everything that the detective and the scientist had said. When he had done with his tale, Astok sat in secret thought for a few minutes.

"The tales you tell me are so far apart that I can give credence to none of them," he announced at length.

"There is but one solution. Although they are never used, for the Selom have forgotten the meaning of a falsehood, we have instruments which will drag the truth from the brain of a liar. They are powerful and their use may easily be fatal. If a man gives forth the contents of his brain willingly, the process is not painful. If he tries to conceal anything, it is torture. Will you willingly submit your brains to the searching of this instrument?"

"Gladly," came Dr. Bird's thought and Carnes reechoed it.

"And you, Ivan Saranoff?" demanded the king.

"I will not submit," thought the Russian sullenly.

"You will be examined whether you submit willingly or not," replied Astok. "I am going to learn the truth though I kill you all to get it."

At the king's order, Jumor hastened from the laboratory. He returned in a few minutes with an apparatus similar to the one which Saranoff had planned to use on Dr. Bird, but larger, and with more dials on the crystal box. At a command from the king, Dr. Bird donned the helmet.

The king manipulated switches and dials. Around Dr. Bird's head glowed a halo of crimson light. Twice an expression of momentary pain passed over his countenance. After half an hour, Astok cut on the power and nodded to Carnes.

"Don't try to hold anything back, Carnesy," said Dr. Bird sharply. "You couldn't if you tried, and the process is very painful, I can assure you."

With the helmet on his head the detective sat for ten

minutes while the Selom king went through his brain. A dozen times he shrieked in agony but his moments of suffering were short. The king removed the helmet.

"Your minds agree well," he thought. "Now I will examine the mind of my friend."

The helmet was strapped on Saranoff. Instantly an expression of the utmost anguish crossed his face. Shriek after shriek of agony came from his writhing lips. Relentlessly the king applied more power. The cries of the Russian grew heartrending. Suddenly he grew rigid and slumped forward in his chair. Astok impassively manipulated his instrument. After half an hour, he opened the switch and removed the helmet. Under the ministrations of Jumor the Russian revived. The king sat in secret thought for an hour.

"I have examined the brains of all of you," he announced at length, "and I find hopeless contradictions. Each of you believes thoroughly in his own social order. Both tell me of hopeless misery on the part of a large portion of his people. Both tell of horrible wars and suffering beyond my

comprehension. The thoughts of all of you teem with modes of bringing death to your fellow beings. Your entire science has been perverted to the ends of destruction. Nothing of the sort can be realized by the Selom where truth, justice and mercy prevail. Each of you holds that his form of government is better than the other, and will cause less suffering and misery than the others'. None of you hold out hope of happiness for your fellow beings. I do not know which system is less obnoxious. My decision is made. The Selom will not interfere in the affairs of the upper-earth. You may fight out your battles without aid and without interference.[272]

"I will operate on both Ivan Saranoff and Dr. Bird. I will remove from their minds all knowledge of our science and instruments and leave them in the same condition that they were when they entered my realms. Each of you will then be returned to upper-earth, Ivan Saranoff to Russia, Dr. Bird and Mr. Carnes to the United States. The pilots, whom I hold prisoners, will have their mentalities restored and be returned to their homes. The planes we have

captured, I will send off into time so that they can never be used for the misery of upper-earth men again. Jumor, you will carry out these orders."

"I wish I could remember how that time machine was built and operated," said Dr. Bird reflectively, as he sat in his private laboratory in the Bureau of Standards some time later, "but Jumor did his work well. I can't even remember what the thing looked like."

"Well, Doctor, our trip below wasn't a loss. We removed a very real menace to the established order of things and we have got rid of Saranoff temporarily. It will take him some time to return here from Russia."

"Three weeks or less," said Dr. Bird pessimistically. "However, we have gained one other thing. Did you notice this?"

He pulled what looked like a watch from his pocket. Carnes regarded it with a puzzled expression.

"No, Doctor, what is it?"

"It is a very small camera which takes pictures one-half inch by seven-eighths. I had several opportunities to use it. I wasn't sure that it would work on such short waves, but it did. When Saranoff tries to return to this country, he will find that every immigration inspector and every member of the border patrol has an excellent likeness of him. That may hinder his entrance into the country for a little while."

September 1931

103 The Copper-Clad World by Harl Vincent

summary goes here

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

104 Devil Crystals of Arret by Hal K Wells

summary goes here

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

105 The Sargasso of Space by Edmond Hamilton

summary goes here

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

106 The God in the Box by Sewell Peaslee Wright

summary goes here

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

October 1931

107 In The Orbit of Saturn by Roman Frederick Starzl

summary goes here

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

108 The Heads of Apex by Francis Flagg

summary goes here

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

109 The Red Hell of Jupiter by Paul Ernst

summary goes here

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

110 The Solar Magnet by Sterner St. Paul Meek

summary goes here

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

November 1931

111 The Planetoid of Peril by Paul Ernst

summary goes here

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

112 Hawk Carse by Desmond Winter Hall

summary goes here

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

113 Raiders Invisible by D. W. Hall

summary goes here

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

114 The Terror From the Depths by Sewell Peaslee Wright

summary goes here

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

115 Spawn of the Comet by H. Thompson Rich

summary goes here

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

December 1931

116 Out Around Rigel by Robert H Wilson

summary goes here

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

117 The White Invaders by Ray Cummings

summary goes here

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

118 Giants of the Earth by Sterner St. Paul Meek

summary goes here

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

118 The Infra-Medians by Sewell Peaslee Wright

summary goes here

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

119 Morale by Murray Leinster

summary goes here

Aproximate word count:

Bigotry:

Warnings:

- - -

